

## **Facilitation of alumni engagement through social media**

Johanna Tervalo



<b>Author</b> Johanna Tervala	
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<p>This master's thesis study is an explanatory study aiming to formulate a strategy implementation plan for alumni engagement through social media communication for Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences Alumni network.</p> <p>The Haaga-Helia Alumni network currently often loses the contact to international graduates without first being able to involve them in the alumni activities. The network, however, would have a lot to gain from having active alumni, as well as a lot to offer to the alumni in terms of career advancement and professional development. The Haaga-Helia Alumni network currently contacts the alumni with an email system, but only approximately 30 % of the recipients currently read the monthly newsletter. As this communication is only one-directional and the response rate is quite low, other alternatives must be considered. This study will investigate how the alumni network should exist in social media in order to better engage especially the international alumni.</p> <p>The study also clarifies the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network based on the study results in co-operation with the Haaga-Helia Alumni. Haaga-Helia Alumni's action plan and SWOT analysis have been used as the basic assumptions and statistical data has been collected from admissions registers of Haaga-Helia as well as from the alumni network registers. The main data collection was a survey that was issued to the Haaga-Helia alumni and students.</p> <p>The conceptual framework is based on the basic model of strategic management, which gives frames to what is being done, and the honeycomb framework of social networking, which guides how it should be done. Professional literature regarding engagement and alumni were used to support these frames from the practical perspective.</p> <p>The survey was answered by 557 respondents of whom 20 % originally are from outside of Finland. The distribution of countries was very wide, which is why this survey did not give any results concerning particular countries. Furthermore, there collected data indicated strong correlation between the responses from the Finnish and international students, which could indicate that the all the alumni might respond similarly to any improvement actions, although the data itself suffers from some limitations thus making the conclusions somewhat unreliable.</p> <p>As a result of the study, the alumni network was recommended to carry out monthly virtual activities, such as seminars, blog posts and online interaction within professional themes to keep the interest alive. Additionally creating a Facebook page could be considered. Given that the vast majority of the student respondents were international students and that the alumni network have extremely limited resources available, some general recommendations outside the scope of this study to focus the efforts on increased engagement of the students who effectively will become – more likely still engaged – alumni.</p> <p>While the collected data contain some limitations, overall the results can be considered valid in terms of providing information for development of the alumni activities in general.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Alumni, engagement, strategy, international, honeycomb framework for social media	

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# 1 Introduction

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (further in this study referred to as Haaga-Helia) has an alumni network (Haaga-Helia Alumni, further in this study referred to as HHA) that builds and supports the network of the graduates of Haaga-Helia. The purpose of the network is to offer networking opportunities and share educational and professional information in return for getting access to visiting lecturers and company partnerships and later even donations.

The alumni are a valuable source of an experience and competence, and so many alumni are asked to come back to school for instance to be a guest lecturer or to mentor students. In addition to this, HHA network can support alumni's companies to find either business partners or students to carry out their practice period or thesis process in the company. HHA awards yearly one of the alumni for excellent contribution to helping the students of Haaga-Helia or to celebrate their exceptional career success. (Haaga-Helia 2015a)

Joining the HHA network is voluntary and free of charge. According to the current process graduating students are offered an easy option to register as a member of the HHA with the same form, with which they apply for graduation. Additionally a reminder of HHA is attached to their diploma. Any Haaga-Helia graduate can also register at any time by filling out a form in the HHA website. (Haaga-Helia 2015a) However, despite the methods described above, many potential members of HHA are most likely missed due to several hindrances. The Alumni Coordinator does not get information regarding graduates from the student affairs' office early enough to send a personal email invitation (the Haaga-Helia email address is only available until 30 days after the graduation), and the graduates find the process to register as a member of HHA via the web form cumbersome and easy to miss. The co-operation with the degree programme leaders has not worked well, as they are concerned about the information overflow that the new students have to endure and therefore deny the access to the classes. (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2016a) It is illegal to automatically add the graduates to the alumni registry, which is why the person always needs to give a personal consent in advance. It has been proposed that the graduates are informed of the procedure of automatically joining them to the alumni network unless they specifically deny it, but this proposition has not yet been approved. (Loippo-Sännälä, 2015)

The alumni registry currently contains 25 345 members, of which only 14 795 can be contacted via email. 2 000 of these email recipients have cancelled their newsletter subscription. (Loippo-Sännälä 2016)

Alumni services at Haaga-Helia currently consists of one fixed-term person, who normally works full time with alumni services. During the recent years the Alumni Coordinator has changed several times and the current Coordinator was additionally assigned to coordinate career and recruitment services with 50 % allocation during 2015 thus decreasing the time allocated for the alumni services. There have also been challenges internally at Haaga-Helia to fully utilise the Alumni Coordinator. The lecturers often contact their network of contacts directly, which means that the Alumni Coordinator does not always have a full picture of all the on-going activities with HH alumni and partner companies. The Alumni Coordinator maintains a list of roughly 500 active alumni, who could all be invited as guest speakers, but due to the independent approach within the programs, the full potential of this competence is left unused. (Loippo-Sännälä 2015)

In the past HHA activities have mostly included only communication and a few yearly events, but the latest Haaga-Helia strategy (Haaga-Helia 2015c) aims to grow the international network of former and current students as well as other significant stakeholders in addition to specifically mentioning facilitation of an active alumni network. The goal further aims to create partner agreements with other international contact networks. Efficiently and purposefully functioning alumni network is extremely important as it can have a significant impact on the financial position of Haaga-Helia; some discussions have already been initiated whereby the alumni unit would start collecting donations for various causes. Currently HHA more or less loses the contact to the international graduates, which in turn means lost opportunities of co-operation. Moving towards a virtual community is sensible also from that perspective that alumni events suffer from vast amounts of no-shows, as lately over a half of the enrolled attendees have dismissed an event without sending a cancellation in due time. (Loippo-Sännälä 2015) Moreover, engaged students overseas can make a significant contribution in promoting the education possibilities in their alma mater. In addition to that the international body of students and alumni can help improving the international co-operation in organising local teaching and learning, offering exchange possibilities for students and improving the relationships with research partners. (Arboleda 2015)

In general, a university alumni association can be characterised as “university’s largest and most permanent constituency”. From the university’s perspective it is usually responsible for identifying the alumni and keeping track of them, informing them about

current events at the university, increasing interest in the alma mater, involving the alumni in relevant activities within the university and offering alumni opportunities to give back. (Clouse Dolbert 2002, 13-14) Often these constituencies are called associations, but Haaga-Helia prefers to emphasize the communal nature and structure of HHA, which is why it is rather referred to as Haaga-Helia Alumni network than a respective association. (Loippo-Sännälä 2015)

The outcome of this study is a strategy implementation plan to better engage the international alumni in future. Specifically this thesis is focusing on evaluating how social media could facilitate a successful strategy implementation, and what (if any) cultural differences should be considered in the communication through social media. HHA has transformed the Haaga-Helia strategy, which is written on a very high level, into improvement goals for alumni relations, which have further been used as a basis for the engagement plan implementation. Strategy implementation and engagement related literature have been reviewed in order to create an implementation plan that makes the alumni activities as attractive to the Haaga-Helia alumni as possible. The honeycomb model of social media have been utilised to evaluate the needed characteristics of an ideal social media platform. A peer review has been conducted among other universities' engagement plans and strategies to further support the creation of the implementation plan. The main data collection has been done through a survey issued to Haaga-Helia alumni as well as students and exchange students. For Haaga-Helia this study aims to provide means to create, restore and maintain contact with Haaga-Helia alumni.

## 2 Needs and objectives

This chapter elaborates the reasons behind selecting this research problem for this study as well as describing the expected benefits it will provide for the organisation in question.

### 2.1 Background

Current way of keeping in touch with the alumni network is mainly through “e-Signals”, which in practice is an email that is being sent to a distribution list containing all HHA members. It contains links to the respective news article, which are opened in the internet browser. e-Signals are also published in the HHA internet pages. The system that is used for distributing the info letter provides some tracking statistics, and based on those data it has been evident that only a small percentage of the recipients actually open the info letter. The recipients can cancel their subscription of the e-Signals newsletter, but they are asked to update their contact information before a notification is sent to the e-Signals administrator. (Loippo-Sännälä 2015)

The alumni network has not been very active in social media platforms, but Haaga-Helia has two relevant LinkedIn groups: one for the university (Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences) and the other for the alumni network (Haaga-Helia Alumni Network (Official)). The latter currently hosts a network of around 2 000 Haaga-Helia alumni. The first is open for anyone (and therefore is being followed by both students and alumni) whereas joining the latter requires manual cross-checking with Haaga-Helia graduation lists prior to membership acceptance. In the past the alumni network has also had a page in Facebook. However, the communications department decided to close the pages and has not seen any need to reinstate them despite for instance the wishes from the students located in Vierumäki and some of the alumni. (Loippo-Sännälä 2015) These communication methods have not been particularly efficient in the past and therefore the alumni network now needs a strong action plan to engage the alumni and to make the most of the alumni network.

In April 2015 a group of international Haaga-Helia students had a brainstorm related to a thesis work that aimed to create a local HHA chapter to Vietnam. An earlier discussion had resulted in a conclusion that HHA was not so well known amongst the students and therefore the brainstorming session was set up to collect ideas of how the different stakeholders could benefit from HHA. (Pham & Loippo-Sännälä 2015)



One of the ideas raised in the workshop was the possibility to create local branches for focused support. This would benefit the alumni but also HHA if these branches additionally were used to locally engage the alumni. One issue that the workshop recognised was that currently HHA does not market itself for the students – some of whom would like to join the network already as students –, which might mean lost alumni for the network. The workshop proposed that the operations be extended to cover also activities directed to students. A common forum was seen as one of the most important things in creating the community around alumni activities. (Pham & Loippo-Sännälä 2015) Any decision to include the students in the alumni marketing has not been taken so far.

## **2.2 Objectives**

The objective of this study was to

- Clarify the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network
- Contribute to the improvement of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network's ways to get connected to and to keep touch with the international graduates
- Contribute to the increase of the active involvement of the international members of HHA

The objectives were achieved by creating a strategy implementation plan for efficient engagement of alumni through social media, implementing one action and evaluating the outcome. It included an evaluation of the possible social media communication channels in order to find out which of them would be most beneficial considering that many of the alumni actually no longer live in Finland. Other findings concerning improvement of the alumni relations outside the scope of this thesis have been stated in this report and delivered to Alumni Coordinator as recommendations.

The network benefits having efficient methods of interacting with its members. Current situation is not supporting the purpose of HHA. Due to the past experiences some solutions can be directly ruled out: sharing information through email is not working as a single means since it only reaches a minority of alumni and since it is not facilitating any interaction; sending paper info letters would be more expensive and there is no guarantee that the message would reach any more recipients than the email. One option could be to build a completely new technical solution to be used for instance with mobile phones (mobile app). However, it might not be feasible to get funding for implementation and launching of this solution, which is why it has been ruled out from this study.

This study is only focusing on building and strengthening international networks, therefore evaluating the needs of the Finnish networking characteristics and requirements were originally defined out of the scope unless inseparable from the international scope.

### **2.3 Research problem and questions**

The main research problem was

*How to efficiently facilitate active engagement of international alumni through social media?*

These sub-questions were considered

- What are the purpose, mission, objectives and goals of HHA?
- What cultural perspectives should be considered to guarantee maximal engagement of international alumni?

### 3 Related literature

This chapter introduces some relevant theoretical background that will be further studied in the literature review.

#### 3.1 Basic model of strategic management

The basic model of strategic management, which this study will follow, is a composition of four basic building blocks: environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and evaluation and control. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 15)



Figure 1. Basic model of strategic management (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 15)

##### 3.1.1 Environmental scanning

The first phase of strategy management, environmental scanning, aims to identify the key strategic factors. A good way to find the relevant factors is to use the SWOT (Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats) analysis. These can be found in both internal and external environments of the target organisation, which are also in-built to the SWOT analysis (the first two are internal, the last two external). The external environment is divided into natural environment, societal environment (economic, technological, political-legal and sociocultural) and task environment (governments, customers, suppliers, communities etc.), whereas the internal environment forms the most inner circle facilitating such variables as structures, cultures and resources. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 15-16, 99)

SWOT analysis is a commonly used tool for acquiring a holistic view of a situation. Instead of only listing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the analysis should draw some connections between them. This can be done by identifying how the strengths can be used on one hand to take advantage of opportunities (OS) and on the other to avoid threats (TS). Ceasing the opportunities can also help overcome the weaknesses (OW) whereas acknowledging the weaknesses can also contribute to threat avoidance (TW). (University of Kansas 2015)

### **3.1.2 Strategy formulation**

In the strategy formulation phase the aim is to develop a plan regarding the management of the identified opportunities and threats, while utilising the strengths and mitigating or strengthening weaknesses. Formulation starts with generation of mission statement, which explains why the organisation exists. A good mission statement contains two elements: the current and the desired characteristics of the organisation. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 18)

The next step is to define the objectives, which explain concretely the quantifiable expected outcomes, for instance increase of profit or market share or new technological innovations. In some literature the word 'goal' is used as interchangeable term for objective. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 19)

The actual strategy defines how the organisation achieves the objectives and implements its mission. Strategy will consider the practical approaches and aims to ensure that all the advantages and disadvantages are used as efficiently as possible. Organisations can simultaneously have several strategies (overall strategy for general topics such as growth, business strategy for e.g. units or products and functional strategies for certain team) and they usually form a hierarchy in which different strategies support each other. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 19-20)

Final step of strategy formulation is creation of policies, which guide the implementation of strategies and helps to ensure that the strategy is understood in the same way in all parts of the organisation (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 21). For instance the company strategy could be to lower operational costs and the respective policy would state that the employees are not allowed to travel at company's expense.

### **3.1.3 Strategy implementation**

Strategy implementation is the third building block that executes the planned strategies and policies. The implementation usually requires three elements to be defined. Programs are a structured way of conducting a change, which by itself will realise the strategy or transform the environment to facilitate the new strategy. Any such change normally has a price tag, which is given in the respective budget. Budget will also be an important tool in determining whether the change actually is financially justified. Finally, procedures are used to describe on an activity level what steps or action chains must be followed in order to ensure the proper implementation of the plan. For instance, a company can have a process for manufacturing a certain part of a product that maximises the used resources. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 22)

### **3.1.4 Evaluation and control**

Evaluation and control is the final stage in the basic model of strategic management. It is a continuous process that aims to monitor the processes and with that to ensure that both the members of the organisation are implementing the strategies and that the strategies actually are the correct ones. Performance is used as indicator and it must be obtained reliably from unbiased sources. (Wheelen & Hunger 2012, 22)

## **3.2 Engagement in literature**

This chapter introduces the engagement concept in research and professional literature.

### **3.2.1 Definition and literature overview**

The term 'alumni engagement' has been lacking a unified definition, but one proposal is

Alumni engagement means activities and experiences designed to identify, cultivate, steward, solicit, and manage gifts of time, talent, and treasure from former students and graduates of a given institution or enterprise in service to the needs of both alumni and alma mater (Forbes 2014, 1).

The dictionary definitions of 'engagement' vary from "to secure services" to "to become intensely involved", which leads to the importance of defining the meaning in the context, where it is being used (Thomson 2015, 42; Holland *et al.* in Thompson 2015, 42). In organisations engagement can be explained as for instance "[...] driving employees toward a rational, emotional and intellectual commitment to the company" (Shaw 2005, 27). In literature engagement is often used in the context of either 'community engagement' or 'employee engagement'. By definition community engagement is

...the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practice. (CDC 1997, 9 in McCloskey *et al.* 2011, 7)

While it can be argued that members of HHA are affiliated by special interest (professional networking and professional development) and that the alumni activities also enhance the well-being of those belonging to the network (by providing professional opportunities through networking and education), it is fair to say that community engagement cannot fully be applied to alumni relations. The well-being of the members is not the primary purpose of HHA and without Haaga-Helia's active efforts to build the network, the members might not have the natural tendency to form such a group. Nonetheless, the concept of community engagement does share some characteristics with alumni engagement, so investigating related research might bring up some useful points for this study, such as the engagement strategy processes (see chapter 3.2.2). Employee engagement is defined as follows:

Employee engagement is a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being. (Engage for success 2015)

As it by definition is related to workplace relations, it features the special relationship between the two parties, whereby the employee is entitled to a compensation in exchange for their efforts toward the employer. Therefore, like community engagement, neither is employee engagement fully applicable for alumni operations as the members are not contracted to receive compensation from the association. Still, employee engagement theories can be relevant to the alumni engagement, as for instance the emotional aspect of Sirota's three factor model (see chapter 3.2.3).

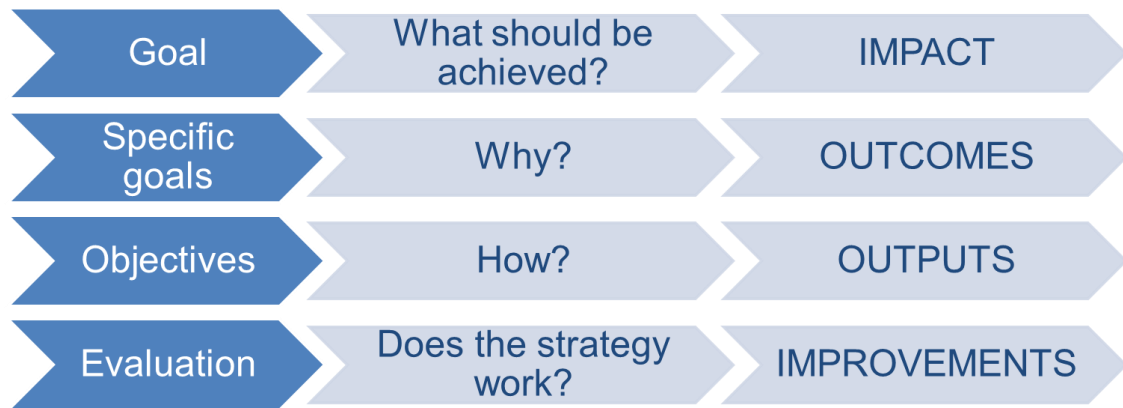
### **3.2.2 Engagement strategy processes**

Before starting any engagement strategy process, the organisation should define the meaning of 'engagement'. This same meaning should then be used consistently in the organisations communications in order to avoid confusion. (Shaw 2005, 27) Furthermore, if any type of survey is used in the engagement strategy process, the management of the organisation should carefully consider that the survey is measuring the right things with

the right vocabulary thus providing the needed outcome in terms of clarity and novel outcome. Otherwise these surveys might cause further confusion or even work against engagement objectives. (Shaw 2005, 29; Binder 6-7)

BSR (Business for Social Responsibility) proposes a “five-step approach” model for stakeholder engagement. Before even beginning the process, the organisation should consider and determine what it is that they mean by stakeholder engagement. In general the concept of stakeholder engagement should include not only communication outwards but really embracing the stakeholder’s perspectives in the organisation’s operations. Once the knowledge of the concept has been distributed across the organisation, the engagement strategy process can be started by defining the vision and the level of ambition (which is modelled in the approach) with simultaneously reviewing the past actions. The next step is stakeholder mapping, which consists of defining the frames for stakeholder analysis (how should the stakeholders be identified and prioritised) as well as the identification of stakeholder groups. Each stakeholder group should also be assigned an engagement model. The aim of the third step, which is preparation, is to set the short and long term goals as well as regulations to guide to achieve these goals. The fourth step consists of the implementation of the engagement itself. The key is to make sure in the process that the stakeholders are committed and contribute as planned. In the final step the engagement facilitator should collect feedback and plan and execute improvement actions as preparation to the next engagement activity. (BSR 2011)

PlanLoCal (2013) gives an example of a strategy creation process for community engagement. First task is to define the mission for the activities and the desired impact. The second tasks is to formulate the answer to question why this strategy and the respective actions are needed or wanted. This process highlights that this step should be done in cooperation with the community so that they have the possibility to give their input. It is also noted that the process team should identify the acceptable range for the activities, which means the acceptable variation in the outcome. The third task consists of defining the objectives: target audience, available resources, timeframes, engagement approaches and communication. All these should be collected to a plan that should be complemented with concrete actions for strategy implementation. Finally, the strategy should be regularly reviewed in order to evaluate whether it still is valid and helping to achieve the right impact.



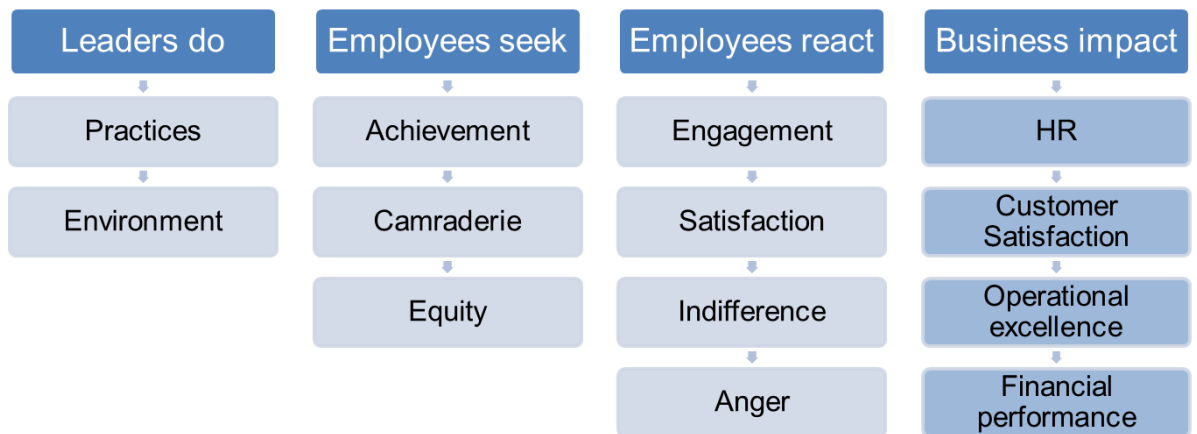
**Figure 2. Community engagement strategy creation process (PlanLoCal 2013)**

Shaw (2005) gives some advice regarding strategy creation process. While it is extremely important to translate the vision into concrete goals and objectives, the strategy creators should acknowledge that no strategy can cover everything. The goals should be a practical, restricted representation of the vision that is achievable by the available resources. The same applies for the means: not every possible way that could contribute to the vision can be utilised within the strategy.

### **3.2.3 Employee engagement**

Sirota (2015) has created an employee engagement model (Three Factor Model), whereby engaging employees intellectually, emotionally and behaviourally the company can ensure that the employees are driving the company forward with a proud and passionate attitude. According to this model there are three main components that employees are looking for in an employer. Achievement means that they wish to feel proudness of what they (both as a company and as an individual employee) do and consequently are making the efforts to do their job well. Achievement also entails that the employees are waiting for the company to acknowledge their job well done. Camaraderie aspect is the community-feel that the employees are expecting: a warm atmosphere with good co-operation with colleagues. Finally, equity refers to the treatment of the employees: they wish to be considered equal in terms of the basic conditions within the company as well as in the respective societal standards.



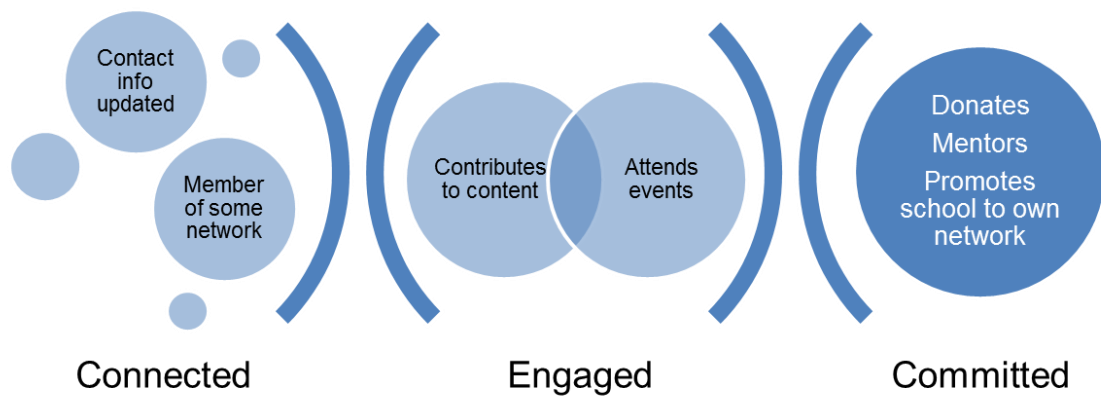


**Figure 3. Sirota's (2015) Three Factor Model for employee engagement**

### 3.2.4 Alumni engagement

Alumni engagement does not seem to be an extensively researched topic based on the literature review, but it is relatively popular among the articles outside the formal scientific literature. According to the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) the foundation of alumni engagement is built on three cornerstones. *Inform* entails for instance informing alumni about relevant missions, strategies and goals. *Involve* pillar can be realised through for instance encourage alumni to give back to the alma mater, collecting feedback and listening to alumni when planning the operations. Finally *respect* pillar consists of for instance advocating alumni aspirations, providing and protecting information and acknowledging contributions. (Thomas 2014) The third pillar addresses very important aspect of alumni engagement, which is emotional attachment. According to a study involving almost 7 000 alumni worldwide confirms that the best way to achieve active alumni engagement is to invest in strong student experience. This includes building an atmosphere that makes the students, future alumni, feeling sense of belonging. (Wanot 2016)

Engagement can also be seen as a mere mid-step towards the ultimate goal, which is a committed alumni. Engaged alumni do contribute to the alumni network, but commitment brings the real value in the form of donations and practical co-operation with the school. (Brittan 2014)



**Figure 4. Alumni engagement stages (Brittan 2014)**

A very crucial part of the alumni engagement is efficient messaging and communication and therefore there are several perspectives that should be considered. The alumni association should clearly communicate that the association truly invests in the alumni and offers them services that are actually beneficial (Hanover Research 2014). These services could for instance be discounts or free admissions to education, possibility to use the school facilities or networking and affinity groups (Schultz 2011, 45). On the other hand, it most likely pays off to listen to the alumni and truly find out what they want out the association. Such surveys are highly recommended to be sent by the president of the institution to avoid the connotation of expected upcoming donation request. (Sharman 2013)

In any case any fundraising should be considered and conducted extremely carefully. The importance of collecting donations should be downplayed in the communication as many surveys have revealed that this is the number one reason alumni are assuming the association is contacting them. This message could be replaced for instance by asking advice instead. (Sharman 2013) Fundraising becomes problematic, if members of the association are categorised based on their donations, donations seem to be the only way to give back or when the fundraising agenda replaces the alumni engagement agenda. Before even considering any fundraising, the alumni association should build trust and respect, find ways to create unique value to the members and facilitate their personal and professional growth. (Toyn 2016)

As the traditional alumni newsletter often is left unread, the alumni news stories should be enticing *relationship stories*, which combine entertainment and selling initiatives (such as the birth of a business framework during an alumni trip) (Catherwood 2015). A significant point to be remembered in communication is that no two alumni are identical as they represent different age groups and degree programs to name a few. The association could for instance establish groups within the association and at least consider these when

planning the services and events if not also in the communication. (Hanover Research 2014; Sharman 2013)

When reflecting on these instructions, one key point should be taken into account. In Finland students for the time being do not have to pay any tuition fees, which is not the situation in for instance in North America. As seen above, the general assumption is that the alumni associations only exist to collect funding. In Finland this has not been the main purpose of the alumni relations.

### 3.3 Benchmarking of existing alumni engagement strategies and plans

A benchmarking among Northern American universities resulted in a best-in class alumni program consisting of several strategic goals. One of them concerns alumni engagement, namely “Actively engages significant portion of its alumni annually (15-20%)”. (University of Calgary 2013, 7)

A peer review has been conducted for this study with some of the results with an internet search using keywords “university alumni engagement strategy”. These engagement plans or strategies were evaluated against standard model of strategic management (table 1) from the perspective of this study, which means that policies, programs and budgets are excluded from the comparison.

**Table 1. A comparison between different university alumni engagement strategies and plans**

University	SWOT	Mission	Objectives (goals)	Strategies	Action plan	
Binghampton University (2015)	√	√	√	√	√	Bin
Griffith University (2015)	-	-	√	-	(√)	gha
Indiana University (2011)	-	√	√	√	√	mpt
Penn State University (2013)	-	√	√	√	(√)	on
The Ohio State University (2015)	-	√	√	√	√	Uni
University of Alberta (2015)	-	√	√	√	√	ver
University of British Columbia (2015)	-	-	√	-	√	sity
University of Calgary (2013)	-	(value proposition)	√	√	√	(20
University of Jyväskylä (2006)	√	√	√	-	√	15)
						has
						de-
						fine

and the following goals in their plan for alumni engagement:

Affirm the Alumni Association as the University's centralized organization for alumni relations;  
Develop high-quality programs and benefits that offer value to alumni;  
Create opportunities for alumni to connect with each other and with students;  
Create spirit and pride in Binghamton University; and  
Support a dynamic alumni volunteer program that provides opportunities, training, stewardship and recognition.

One of Griffith University's (2015) goals is "to encourage meaningful, mutually beneficial engagement between the University and its alumni and students engaged in giving", which is to be achieved with the following strategies:

S5.1 Establish a University-wide Alumni Awards program incorporating young alumni, international alumni and winners from each Academic Group  
S5.2 Establish alumni networks for groups including the Honours College, GUMUR-RII, Logan campus and other chapters  
S5.3 Strengthen on-shore alumni events program and increase social media alumni activity to drive engagement, fundraising and online and education growth  
S5.4 Engage alumni more broadly in all University activities.

Indiana University (2011) has created "the four-I" strategies (identify, inspire, involve and innovate) for alumni engagement:

IDENTIFY alumni most likely to help. IUAA will focus its resources on a diverse group of IU graduates with a high probability for significant involvement with Indiana University over the course of their lives.  
INSPIRE alumni by asking what matters most to them and sharing meaningful information. Inspire IU graduates with interactive communication and experiences to solicit their views, identify their interests, introduce them to role models, explain needs and involvement opportunities, and engage them in conversations.  
INVOLVE alumni in personal enrichment and service opportunities. Create opportunities for IU graduates to invest time, talent, and treasure in ways that are relevant, meaningful, and beneficial to one another and Indiana University.  
INNOVATE to create a remarkable association. Transform IUAA into an exemplary advancement and alumni relations organization respected for its effectiveness, energy, expertise, and inclusiveness.

Penn State Alumni Association (2013) has defined the following as one of their strategic goals under heading "Strengthen alumni engagement":

Increase alumni and member support of both the Alumni Association and the University as measured by their participation in Alumni Association programs, events, and services and the results of periodic alumni opinion surveys.

The Ohio State University (2015) Alumni Association has formulated their strategy as follows:

We will fulfill our vision and mission by focusing on engagement. We must understand and anticipate the needs of our customers, both external (alumni and friends) and internal (colleges and units). By accomplishing this, the Alumni Association will add significant value to Advancement and therefore, to The Ohio State University.

Engagement defined: broaden and deepen constituent participation in activities that are sponsored by, or on behalf of, Ohio State with the aim of growing lasting and beneficial relationships that contribute to mutual success.

The University of Alberta (2015) Alumni Council has defined the following as one of their strategic goals:

To build community among students and alumni by celebrating traditions and our shared campus cultural, athletic, and academic experiences.

#### Alumni Engagement

- Connect with alumni through their interest in lifelong learning via local education programming, alumni travel, regional branch events, chapter activities, Alumni Weekend, and other premier events.
- Connect with alumni through lifelong learning opportunities.
- Concentrate engagement efforts in priority markets and focus on post-event followup [sic].
- Create premier events to attract alumni to campus.
- Utilize a lifecycle approach for program development.
- Celebrate history and traditions through reunions and alumni communications, and build toward planning for 2015 – the centenary of the Alumni Association.

The University of British Columbia (2015) states one of their goals as follows:

Expand University-wide efforts to engage alumni and increase the capacity of the Alumni Association to support this endeavor and promote UBC.

The University of Calgary (2013, 10) has set forth the following strategic objectives concerning alumni operations:

- Create a partnership framework that leverages existing strengths at the University of Calgary and generates a substantial increase in opportunities for alumni to be involved with the university in ways that benefit alumni, the University of Calgary, and the community
- Establish an alumni relations service-delivery model for university-wide and faculty-based programming that facilitates alumni engaging with each other and with the university
- Improve institutional knowledge of alumni feelings, needs, and behaviours to better serve alumni and the university
- Make strategic use of communications as an alumni engagement tool
- Build strong alumni communities to foster support for the university and to nurture valued relationships for alumni.

The Alumni Association of the University of Jyväskylä (JYKYS ry) (2006) has earlier created a strategy for alumni relations, which includes a process called “Abista Alumniksi” (from candidate for matriculation examination to alumni), whereby the already the potential future students of University of Jyväskylä are considered as potential alumni.

In spring 2015 a Haaga-Helia alumni association local chapter was created for Vietnam as a result of a master’s thesis. An engagement plan as such was not created in the process, but the following topics were identified in the 1<sup>st</sup> year plan. The vision of the new local chapter is to “become the first and the leading local alumni chapters of” HHA. The mission is to help connect Haaga-Helia and the Vietnamese alumni by networking, knowledge sharing and strengthening Haaga-Helia brand and core values are listed as connecting, education, diversity and integrity. In addition to these location, management, partners, and marketing related questions were defined. The plan included an extensive event plan that spawned over to June 2016. (Pham 2015)

What is common to most of these plans is that the current level of alumni activities or opportunities or services provided for the alumni are seen as inadequate and especially the alumni are needed to be brought closer to the university and the current activities. Seems that lack of engagement is a wider issue, which these alumni associations are trying to address with formalised strategies.

### **3.4 Social networking in communication**

This chapter evaluates how social media could be utilised in procedures aimed to implement engagement strategies.

#### **3.4.1 The benefits of social media**

According to a Social Media Marketing study (Stelzner 2015, 5) Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn will be the most significant social media platforms from the marketing perspective as many marketers are planning to increase their social media usage. The biggest benefit that social media brings to a company is increased exposure (figure 5) (Stelzner 2015, 5).



**Figure 5. Benefits of social media marketing (Stelzner 2015, 17)**

According to studies the young seem to favour such communication media that allows them to be in control of sharing and creating content (user-generated media). This means that it does not pay off to target the same marketing to users of all ages. (Madell and Muncer 2007, Shao 2009 and Nigro 2010 in Kowalik 2011). Social media has proved to be very effective in marketing to young adults. It has even been verified in the context of alumni connections as it helps to spread the message to a larger crowd (King Scully 2012, 30)

Research has shown that consumers tend to favour social media over other advertising channels, and therefore many companies have also started to focus their marketing efforts to social media (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno 2011 and Mangold & Faulds 2009 in Palmer 2013). This has also been noted in the context of university communication, as despite of not having the full support of all stakeholders, presence in the social media is a necessity (Reuben 2008 in Palmer 2013). Thereby also alumni communication will benefit of adopting this new way of networking (Kowalik 2011 in Palmer 2013) – even beyond the purpose of mere marketing (Busch 2011 in Palmer 2013).

In a study concerning the Twitter usage in six Australian universities, it was discovered that in order for the networking to work efficiently, a critical mass of followers is needed. This efficiency can be measured for instance with the ratio of retweets and followers. Additionally, any organisation (re-)establishing a new social media platform should

acknowledge that the crucial factor in successful implementation is to provide the content and purpose for the channel in question. (Palmer 2013)

According to the 3-M framework (Gallaughier & Ransbotham 2010) three interaction types should be considered when evaluating social media platforms. The sharing of information by the organisation or company is called *Megaphone* interaction and is by definition one-directional. Bi-directional and customer (or user) initiated dialog is *Magnet*, which requires the organisation to have a strong social media identity to attract inbound traffic. The third option, *Monitor*, will shift the activity from between the user and organisation to something that happens amongst users. In this case, though, the dialog still happens within the organisation's space so that it is able to engage with the dialog whenever suitable. Being active in social media and facilitating all three options can offer the organisation good possibilities to improve their brand and reputation as well as engage customers or organisation members. (Gallaughier & Ransbotham 2010, 199-200)

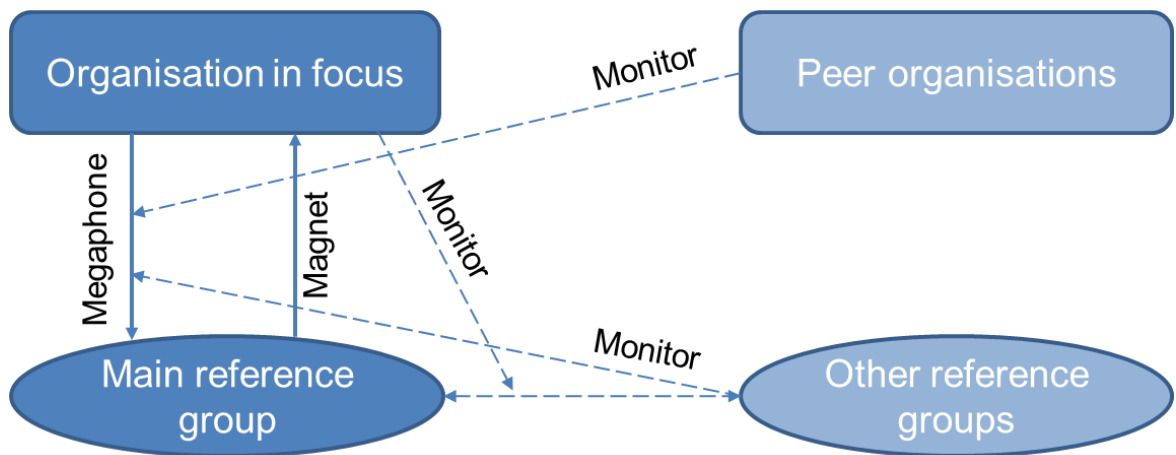


Figure 6. 3-M model of social media interaction (Gallaughier & Ransbotham 2010, 200)

### 3.4.2 Social Network Theory

The social network theory studies how members of a group or an organisation interact with each other within their respective network. The network's smallest units are called actors or nodes, and they can be for instance groups or organisations in addition to individuals. Networks are roughly categorised in three groups: ego-centric networks (one node connected to all), socio-centric networks (closed groups with a common nominator, e.g. employees of a company) and open-system networks (no clear boundaries). The strength of the relationship between nodes is usually expressed with strong / weak characterisation, whereby strong ties would be represented by mutual exchange of phone



numbers (and subsequent expectation of a phone call) and weak ties by unexpected phone call. (Claywell 2015)

### 3.4.3 Honeycomb framework of social networking

The honeycomb framework for social media is a model that aims to present the different aspects of social media so that companies could better understand the opportunities and pitfalls of social media and to utilise it effectively in their stakeholder engagement. The framework consists of seven functional building blocks, each of which have two perspectives: (1) the user experience and (2) its implications for companies. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 242)

**Identity** block defines how much users are both consciously and unconsciously sharing information about themselves. This identity question is tightly connected to privacy and in fact to protect their person users often create profiles, which do not reflect themselves but rather a fictional character. These ‘unidentified’ users should not be overlooked by organisations, since at times users with made-up virtual identity might make a significant contribution to the virtual community. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 243)

**Conversations** block describes the extent of the users’ willingness and eagerness to engage in discussions. There are multiple of possible reasons that might initiate such an action, and the platform itself gives some frames to the purpose of the discussion. For instance Twitter is best suited for short dialogs about current events or topics whereas a blog often hosts a deeper or longer discussion around a specific topic. This should be taken into account in efficient usage of a certain platform: the organisation must be able to produce content at the pace and extent required by the nature of the platform. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 245)

**Sharing** block is used to represent “the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content” (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 245). While sharing often has the social aspect in that sharing happens between people that is always not the case. Furthermore, it must be noted that sharing does not necessarily mean that the stakeholders engage in conversations. Regarding the implications to a company using social media, they should identify the “object that can mediate their share interests”. Otherwise the people are merely formally connected to each other without any valid common context. Another thing is to set some frames onto the content that is being shared; namely the platform or the moderator of the community should ensure that material that is not compliant with copyrights or that is inappropriate by nature cannot be shared. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 245)

**Presence** block represents the online presence of a user and particularly how well other users can have access to this availability information. While in some platforms this availability is restricted to the online presence, some platforms have developed functionalities that tie the location to the physical location of the user, which somewhat fades out the boundary between virtual and physical reality. The implication of the presence is that in some cases synchronous virtual presence might provoke users to engage in sharing and conversations. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 246)

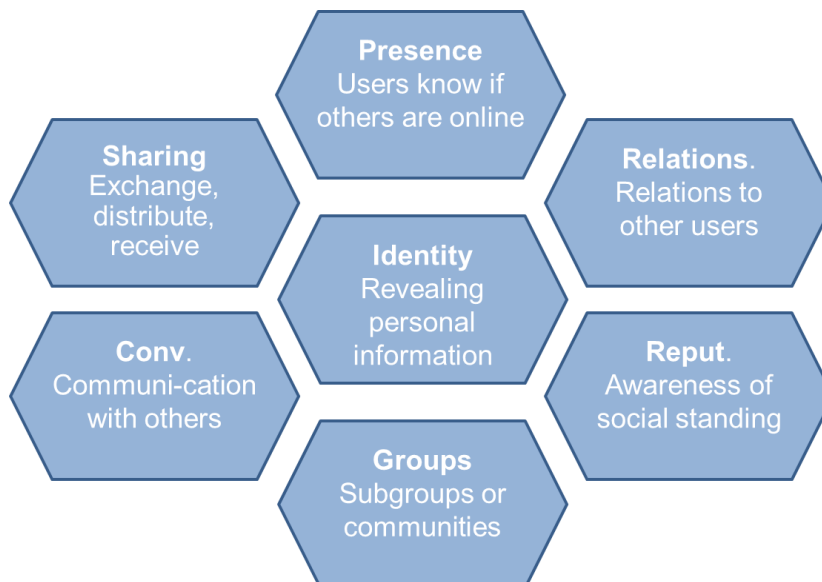
**Relationships** block quite literally represents the connection that two users can have and it contains the extent to which they are likely to converse, share or merely list each other as connections. Often the nature of the social media platform dictates the nature of the relationship. For instance LinkedIn is mostly used for professional purposes and therefore it has such functionalities as network information beyond 1<sup>st</sup> contacts, profile validation, referral and endorsement. As for the implications, there are two properties that should be considered: structure, which indicates the influence of the user (the more connections they have and the denser the network is, the more central their role in the network is), and flow, which indicates the variety of connections the user has (for instance colleagues and friends). Therefore, if the focus on the social network is intended to be for instance professional and formal, the moderators should make an effort to authenticate all members. One aim could be to offer the users a possibility to grow their own personal networks. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 246)

**Reputation** block is the representation of the other users' standing within the setting of social media. Reputation can manifest itself through trust (for instance Twitter followers validate the content that is delivered by the followee) or rating (for instance endorsements in LinkedIn). The implication for companies is that if the reputation is valuable for them, they should choose a metric to validate the reputation; for instance number of views or followers. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 247)

Groups block describes how users are able to form communities and sub-communities. This block also contains the aspect of network size: while Dunbar (1992 in Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 247) argued that the maximum number of contacts a person can have in their social network is around 150, social media groups have continuously grown beyond this limit. Many platforms therefore contains tool for contact management. The direct implication of this is that community should offer the possibility to form smaller groups if that is technically possible. However, the indirect implications of grouping are equally significant. For instance allowing everyone the same rights to share and converse might result in un-

controllable information flow, which would call for block-specific settings (e.g. providing presence information only certain connections). On the other hand this type of permission management quickly becomes too complicated, which is reflected in the platform providers' reluctance to provide elaborate functionalities for this purpose. (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 248)

Companies can create social media strategies on top of the honeycomb framework by following four 'C's: cognize (get an understanding of the social media landscape of the company against honeycomb framework including where in the virtual world company already exists), congruity (align the social media functionalities with company's business needs and marketing strategies), curate (plan what, how and when the company is involved in the social media and implement appropriate controls (external consultants can be assigned to monitor social media and produce content)) and chase (follow the current events and evolution of social media and take actions – immediately, if needed).



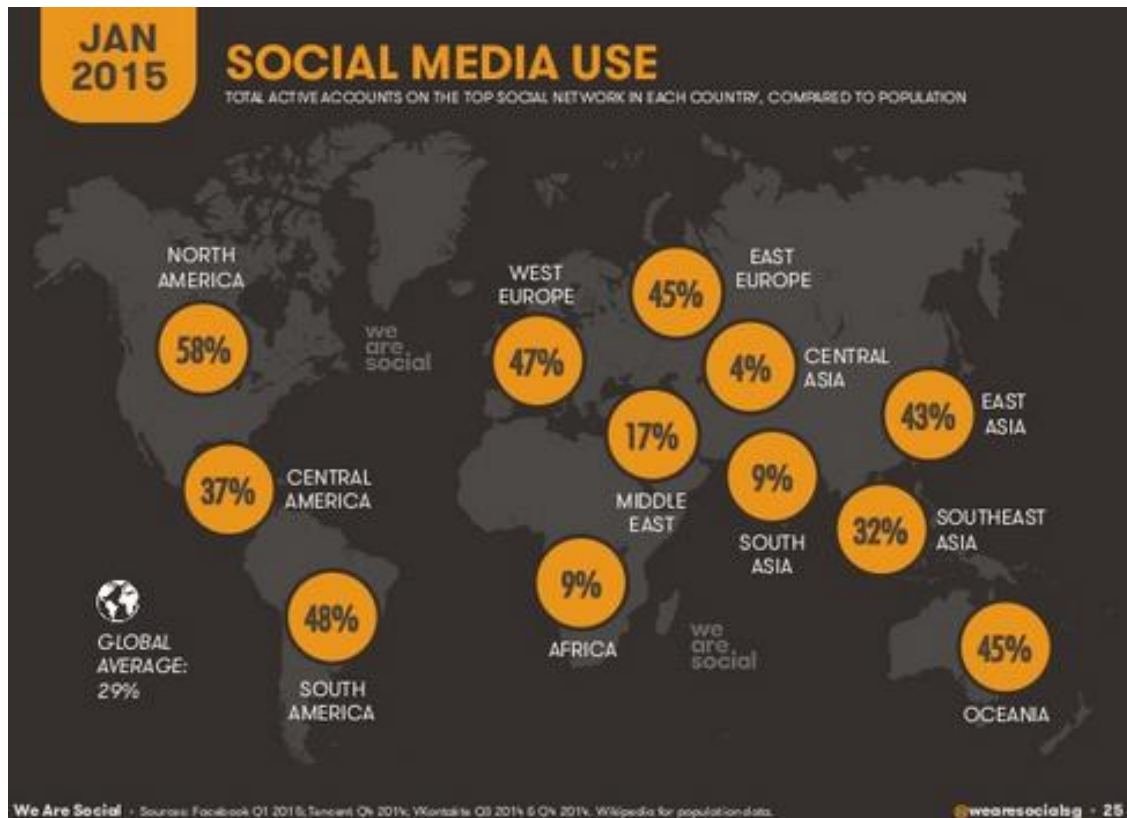
**Figure 7. The honeycomb model of social media (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011)**

### 3.4.4 Cultural differences and social media platforms

As Ghemawat (Lagace 2015) argues, despite the advances in global integration, the world is far from flat. He identifies four categories of issues that everyone attempting to establish cross-border operations should consider: cultural, administrative/political, geographic, and economic. In the context of this study only the first two are relevant.

Cultural differences are evidently visible also in the social media behaviour. Figure 8 (Kemp 2015) shows the number of social media accounts compared to the population,

which shows significant differences between continents: note for instance 47 % in Western Europe, 32 % in south-east Asia and only 9 % in Africa.

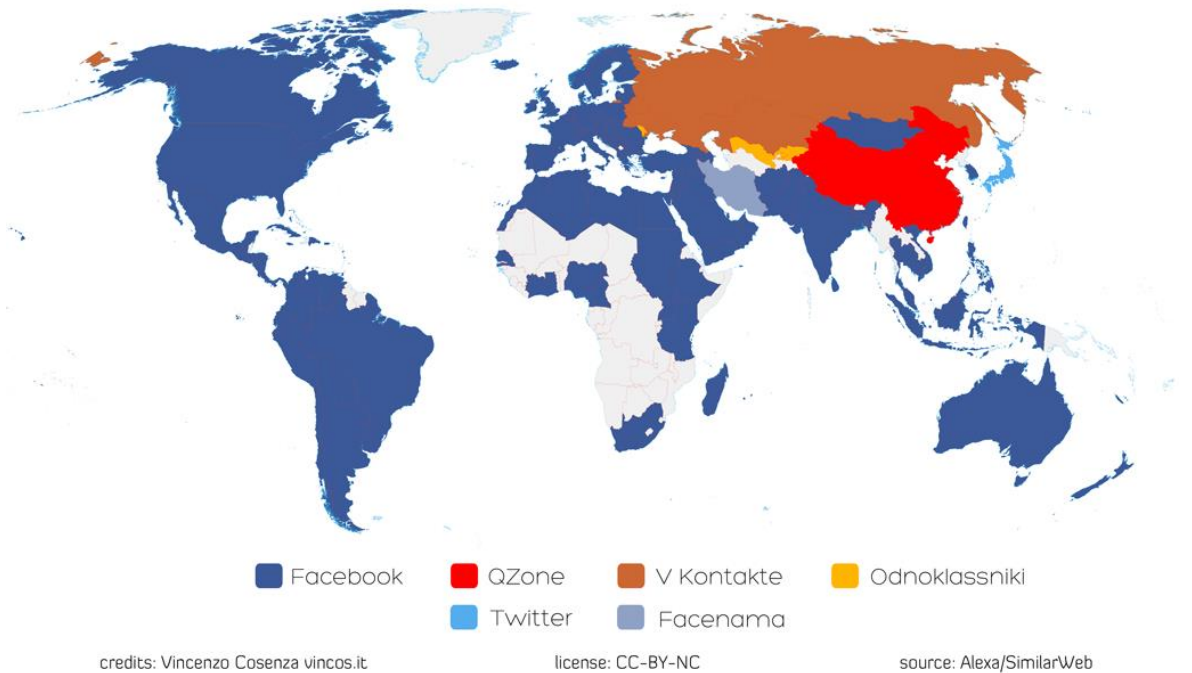


**Figure 8. Social media accounts compared to population (Kemp 2015)**

Depending on the source (calculation method, time of research and scope), the number of users in the biggest social media platforms differs a little bit, but it is still extremely clear that Facebook rules globally (see figure 23 and figure 24 in appendix 1). YouTube may be catching up (Gareth 2014), but other social media platforms are still far behind. However, even though globally the status is clear, Facebook is not the number one in all countries. Figure 9 shows how VKontakte trumps Facebook in Russia and how QZone takes the first position in China. More country-specific statistics of the biggest social media platforms have been collected to appendix 2. The countries have been selected based on assumed relevance to Haaga-Helia.

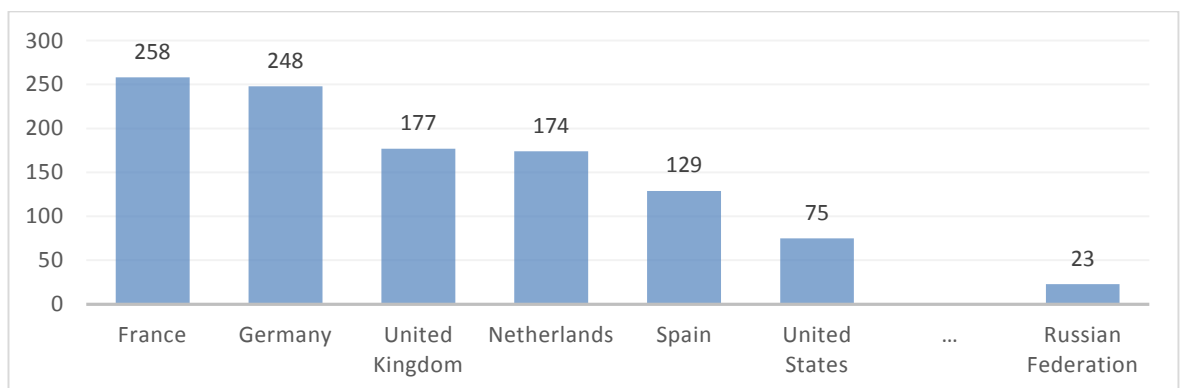
# WORLD MAP OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

January 2016



**Figure 9. World map of social networks (Cosenza 2016)**

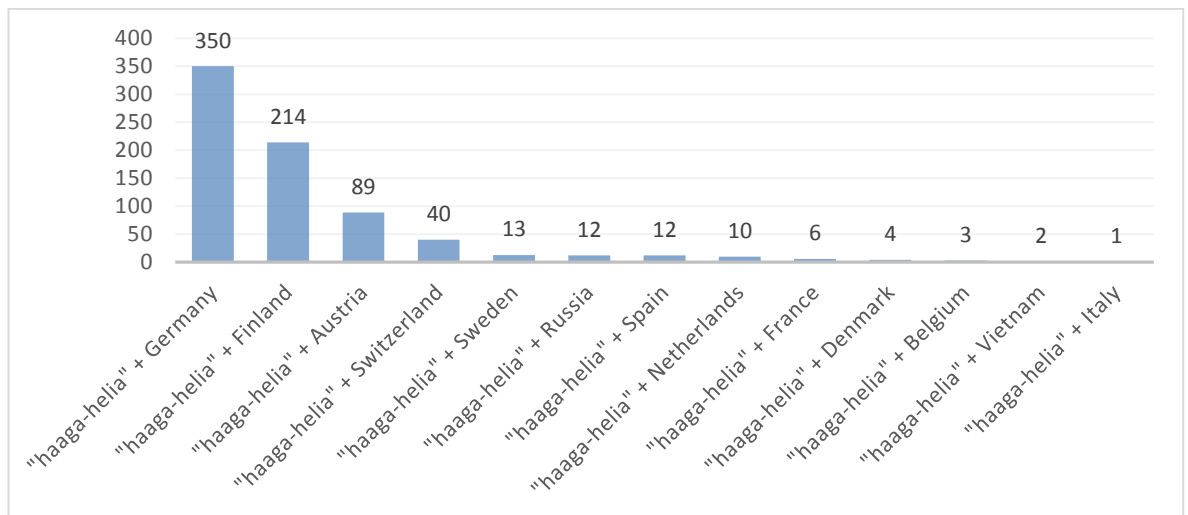
This can also be seen within the LinkedIn users who have listed Haaga-Helia as their university (figure 10). Even though the number of Russian students is relatively high in Haaga-Helia (amount to be verified), there are only few of them in LinkedIn. Of course the reason for the low number can also be that Russian students won't return to Russia after graduation, but assumingly Russians still prefer VKontakte over LinkedIn.



**Figure 10. Haaga-Helia 'expatriates' in other countries than Finland in the HHA LinkedIn group**

These statistics, however, do not consider the purpose of the used channel. At least in Finland it is common that personal and professional accounts are separated and that might be the case in other countries as well. This is to be verified with the survey.

There are also some very regional social media platforms in Europe. Xing.com is a Germany originated professional platform that is mainly used in German-speaking countries. They claimed to have 14 million users globally in February 2015. Furthermore, the demography of Xing seems to be younger than that of LinkedIn, between 18 and 34 years. (Alexander *et al.* 2015) Advanced search functionalities are only available for Premium members, which requires a monthly fee to be paid. However, the simple search, which does not give very accurate view of the countries of current residency as it searches these words from anywhere in the profile but which verifies the assumption, that Xing is used mainly in German-speaking countries (figure 11).



**Figure 11. Xing.com users with "haaga-helia" and country references**

The issue of restricted region of operation has been noted by the users. For instance one user of both platforms informed through a LinkedIn blog post that she is deleting her Xing account as she didn't see the benefit of keeping two identical profiles updated. The decision received support by the commenters, some of whom also mentioned having deleted their Facebook account in similar circumstances. (Epaillard 2015)

Finally, political reasons might affect for instance the availability of social media. Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, China, Vietnam and North Korea have partially or completely banned social media in their territory (Bender 2015).

### **3.4.5 Restrictions and possibilities for communication procedures**

Any organisation planning to establish social media platform must consider several aspects. Firstly, there is a question of university policies. Does the university and the communication department allow and support creating and maintaining accounts or pages parallel to the ones that the university itself has? Is the alumni organisation capable of maintaining and moderating the platform as required to conform to the university policies?

As the key to success is to create dialogue between the alumni and the organisation (magnet) as well as among the alumni (monitor), one option would be to establish a vibrant blog environment, in which all members have the equal option to publish relevant information. In such case the balance between being active enough and not spamming should be found in order to capture the attention of the members. It is also vital to create a usage policy, which explains in detail the general rules for post, content and interaction management in order to avoid issues. (Kowalik 2011) This type of activity could be possible with both Facebook and LinkedIn. However, here again the needed effort for maintaining the platform with adequate content creation must be evaluated.

Even though based on the above Twitter is not widely used in Finland for alumni communications, for instance universities in United Kingdom seem to have Twitter accounts. In addition to being able to collect followers among the alumni, the organisation could launch an 'official alumni' hashtag (such as #HHAAlumniNet), in which case the search function could be utilised.

At least in the United States some universities have gone so far as to create a mobile app for alumni communication. This study will touch upon this possibility – perhaps there are well-working ready software available. In addition it would be interesting to investigate the utilisation of gamification in this context.

Finally, the communication channel itself brings no value, unless the provided content – distributed by both the alumni association and the members of the community – is meaningful. Therefore the survey will contain questions related to the expectations of the current and future members of the alumni association – which potential benefits would they see in the alumni network?

### **3.4.6 Alumni engagement in social media**

As there are numerous social media platforms, not all are perfect for the same purpose. In fact focusing on being active in all possible channels (especially with the same message)

is one of the biggest mistakes an organisation embarking upon social media can do (Reynolds 2012). Suitable platforms for two-way communication, or megaphone (Gallaughner & Ransbotham 2010, 200), are tools aimed for community management, such as Twitter lists or LinkedIn Groups. One-way communication, magnet (Gallaughner & Ransbotham 2010, 200), which essentially is listening to the members of the community, can be conducted using more or less any tools: Twitter, blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn Groups etc.; wherever the alumni are present. (Shaindlin 2010) On the other hand the nature of interaction is also a significant factor in categorising the platforms. For instance LinkedIn has illustrated the distinction between personal and professional networks based on a poll collected from 6 000 social media users in 12 countries. Based on this study the personal networks focus more on spending time and discussing over nostalgic, fun and distractive topics, whereas in professional networks members invest their time and are motivated by achievements, success and aspirations. (LinkedIn in Bennett 2012)

To achieve engagement in Facebook, messaging should not be too formal and a conversational tone should be retained in the posts. The alumni should be made to feel proud of their alma mater, so the content should highlight achievements and significant events and be captivating by nature. All communication should consistently follow high quality standards in terms of content and posting schedules. (Wiederman 2015a) On the other hand alumni associations looking to engage alumni through Twitter should build a strong, personalised Twitter account. Nostalgia can be revitalised by posting pictures of for instance campus or old students and lecturers. Sharing information, achievements, updates and even fun facts, as long as the content is appropriate considering that the audience potentially varies from one extreme to another, will sustain the interest. The dashboard should be utilised to collect information regarding the audience and the posted content. This information can further be used to adjust the social media strategy to attract even a bigger crowd. (Wiederman 2015b)

Since supporting networking in professional sense is often one of the key purposes, it is no wonder that posting and reading job advertisements is one popular way to utilise social media. Similarly the platforms can be used to advice others on job hunting related topics. (Lavrusik 2009)

It is not reasonable to expect the engagement being created on its own simply by creating the social media context or solely by the members of the community, which is why it is advisable to recruit social media ambassadors. A good ambassador is a person who already has some social media following, who is actively vocalising their opinions and who by doing so can influence followers' behaviour. Naturally the content on the social media



platform in question should reflect the interest of these ambassadors and vice versa. Returning the favour ensures the long life of this mutual relationship. (Ware 2012) It is therefore also vital that the alumni association has resources monitoring the social media. To make this easy, a social media management tool can be used to support the personnel who take the needed actions to respond to social media activity. (LePage 2014)

Social media and physical events are not necessarily exclusionary: social media can be effectively utilised in events or seminars by for instance facilitating discussion, offering programmes online or by publishing a map of alumni's current countries of residency. Naturally one possibly engaging – but most likely costly – way of technology is to create university's own mobile app. (Lavrusik 2009) Furthermore, social media activities should be combined with 'old-fashioned' communication channels. The organisation should be able to attract the users to turn to internet pages or email if that serves the purposes of the organisation, for instance sales or – in the case of alumni activities – mentoring, seminars etc. (Reynolds 2012)

One consideration that every institution should take seriously is that in case an official site or group doesn't exist, users are no strangers to creating them by themselves. In that situation the institution will have to invest in unnecessary efforts to promote their own site to be used instead of these unofficial sites. (Lavrusik 2009)

Finally, the reactions to posted information varies depending on the time of day, day of the week etc. For instance, Facebook users are by far most active in sharing on Saturdays and noon seems to be the most optimal time to publish in Facebook, as it is the most active time of day in Facebook. For emails, click rates are the highest in the mornings and on Saturdays. Blogs are being read all day, but the biggest spike is in the mornings. Lunchtime is also a good blog-break time, but readers are most prone to comment on weekends. (Olin 2012)

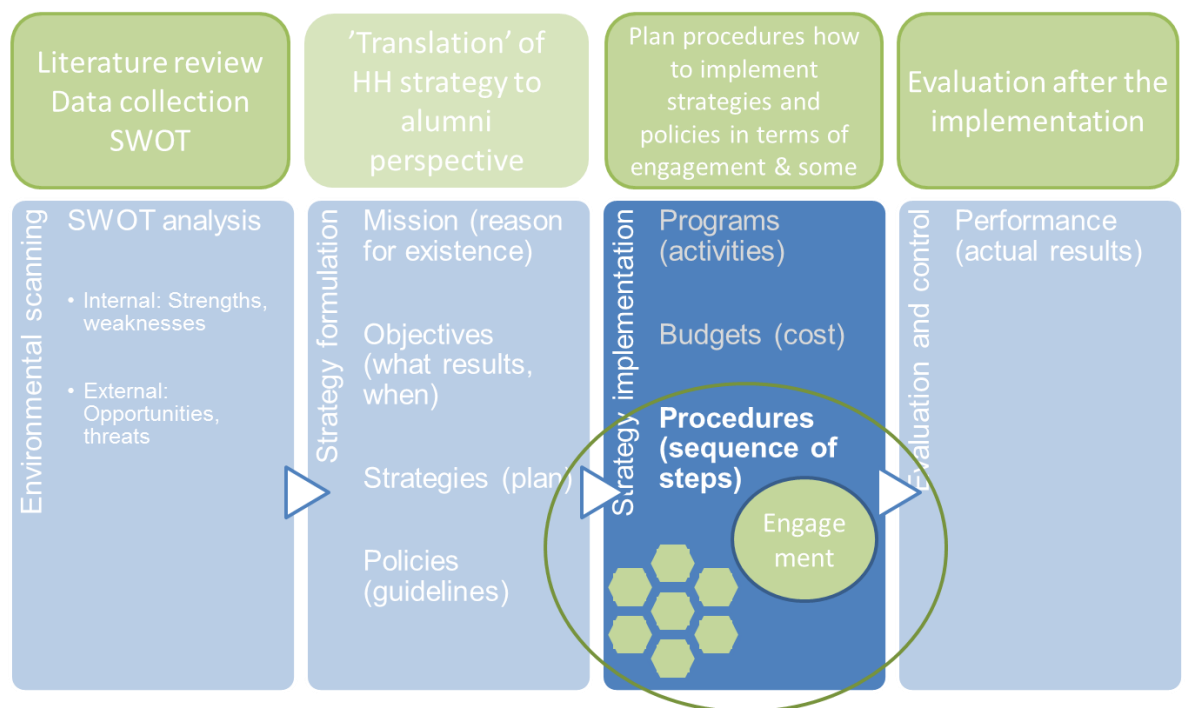
### 3.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study is two-fold:

- a) What is being done: strategy implementation (plan) according to the **basic model of strategic management**
- b) How it's being done: plan for alumni **engagement** through **social media** by utilising the **honeycomb model for social media**

As the scope of the thesis is the implementation of a strategy, only some parts of the basic model for strategy were done within the thesis scope: environmental scanning to get an overview and background information of the situation, strategy implementation – specifically creation of procedures – and evaluation of the strategy implementation. The overall strategy that guides also the operations of alumni association was given by the management of Haaga-Helia. However, as the Haaga-Helia strategy does not give detailed guidelines specifically to alumni activities, the strategy was evaluated and written out from HHA’s perspective by HHA.

**Peer reviews** of peer alumni associations’ engagement strategies were conducted for comparison.



**Figure 12. The scope of this thesis against the basic model of strategic management**

## 4 Research methodologies

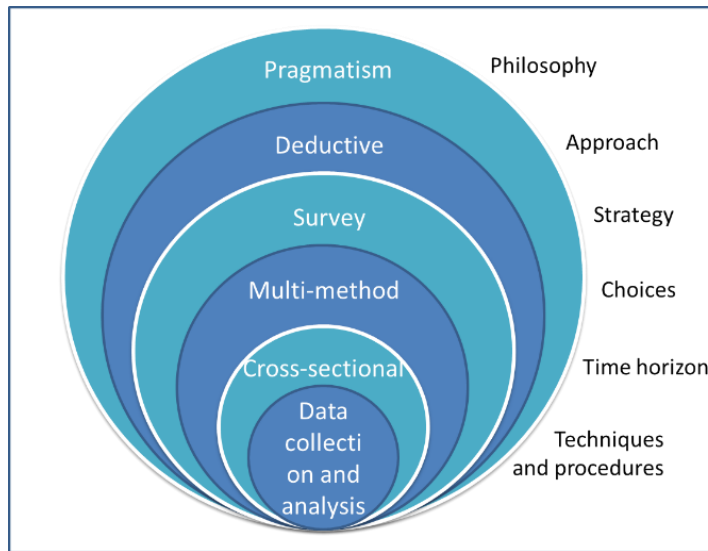
This chapter explains which research methodologies were applied in this study, how data was collected and analysed and how validity and reliability were secured.

### 4.1 Research approach

This study was carried out with a subjectivist ontology point-of-view. Presumably the activity level of the alumni network is very much dependent on the changing perceptions and expectations of the alumni members, who further are subjective to for instance the evolution of technological solutions that most likely affect their behaviour. Moreover, the target group of this study consists of people from different cultures, and assumingly they do not all see the world from the same perspective. Acknowledging that the members of the network all view their (virtual) world from a subjective perspective is a key to understanding their preferences. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 110)

The research onion, which set the frames for this study, is presented figure 13. Judging based on the selected ontological standpoint, the research philosophy adopted in this study could be neither positivism nor realism. Furthermore, as the study was focused on a very practical level to find procedures to implement concrete strategies and as the researcher adopted mainly objective point-of-view but might also have taken a subjective approach as being one of the potential future alumni, the research philosophy in this study is pragmatism. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 109-110)

In terms of epistemology this means that acceptable knowledge can be obtained through both subjective meanings and social phenomena (Saunders *et al.* 2009; 110, 119). For instance in interpretation of the survey results the study could utilise responses of a question directly or deduce subjective assumptions based on the results in other questions. The epistemology in pragmatist studies also is highly focused on practical applied research, which is fully in line with this study as it aims to generate a very practical plan for the strategy implementation.



**Figure 13. Research onion (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 138)**

Several data collection methods were used for this study (strategy related documentation, statistical background data and survey (both qualitative and quantitative data)), so the research choice is multi-method. Potentially, if too few respondents had answered the survey, which is essentially a quantitative data collection method, the data could have been analysed with qualitative analysis processes. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 151) The challenge with surveys is to design it in a manner that ensures good coverage and response rate. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 144) Furthermore, the respondents were asked for a permission to contact them afterwards for further interview, should the collected data from the survey be insufficient. However, this option was not used.

As the main data collection method is a survey (questionnaire) that was sent as economically as possible to as large population as possible and as the study aims to answer to question 'how', the research strategy is survey strategy.

The data collection and analysis tries to draw causal relationships between variables (for instance "since most of the alumni are from country X, HHA should adopt this communication channel as it is the preferred method for students and alumni from that country"), thus making this an explanatory study. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 140-141)

#### **4.2 Data collection and analysis**

Multiple sources of data will be used to acquire all necessary information related to this study.

#### **4.2.1 Qualitative data**

The alumni unit in Haaga-Helia independently from this study worked on the strategic goals for the alumni network with the intent to

- clarify or conduct the SWOT analysis of Haaga-Helia alumni association
- clarify the strategic goals for Haaga-Helia alumni association based on the Haaga-Helia strategy

The participants in this process were the Alumni Coordinator and her Manager. The outcome of the collection of the qualitative data was the SWOT chart with strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, and a list of strategic goals.

Additionally the Vice President of Haaga-Helia was interviewed to ensure the official standpoint of the university. According to the Vice President Jouni Ahonen, who also is accountable for the alumni network activities, the most important goal for the school in general is to be interesting in the eyes of the public. By achieving this goal, the university will be able to attract talented students as well as encourage the alumni to give back in form of donations. (Ahonen, 2016)

#### **4.2.2 Quantitative data**

The collection of needed statistical data are presented in this chapter.

##### **Current email solution**

The statistics related to the current email communication method were evaluated since they were expected to give some insight regarding the culture or country of origin for those alumni who actually read the current info letter. This information is provided by the system use for distributing the letter and is accessible by the Alumni Coordinator. The collected data was used for a short current state analysis. No conclusion of underlying behaviour was drawn based purely on these statistics.

##### **Country of origin and current location**

Both the current student base (to be obtained from the Haaga-Helia student office) as well as the alumni network (obtained from the HHA Coordinator) and applicants (obtained from the Haaga-Helia admissions office) were evaluated based on the country of origin, which most likely has a big impact on the cultural behaviour of those individuals, as well as the current location (if available) as the alumni might adjust to the preferred communication methods in the country in question, regardless of their country of origin.

## Survey

The main data collection method was a survey, which was issued to the existing members of HHA and all students to collect information about the expectations and preferences. The survey was created and published with the Webropol online survey tool, which is available for everyone studying at Haaga-Helia. The link to the survey was distributed through the HHA email system to all alumni and posted in the Haaga-Helia Facebook page as well as the HHA LinkedIn page. A news item was also released in the MyNet front page's newsfeed.

The survey was issued 30 November 2015 and it was originally meant to be open for three weeks until 18 December 2015, since there were concerns that the holiday period might encourage the recipients to push giving their replies only after the holidays if given the chance. However since there were no plans to analyse the results before the holidays, the survey was actually kept open until 31 December 2015. In order to attract more answers, ten items from the Haaga-Helia shop were announced to be raffled between the survey respondents.

Several aspects should be considered in the design of any survey or questionnaire. The purpose and the assumption of the responses defines the type of a question. For instance open questions can be used if there are no clear expectations of the possible answers. The empty space given for the answer must be considered carefully as it guides the respondent or even acts as a repellent (if too big). List questions can be complemented with an option 'other' to make sure that there always is a suitable option to be selected. Category questions' options should be designed in a way that only one option is applicable for each respondent. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 374-375)

The question texts should be written in a very clear way that does not allow any disambiguation. Furthermore, the questions should actually be asking what the researcher wants to find out. The questions should also be as free from bias as possible; for instance phrases such as "too much" or "is this the first time..." send a clear message that the researcher already has done some assumptions on the response. Double negatives and jargon should be avoided as well as embarrassing the respondent with too exact or too invasive questions. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 383-384)

The survey questions were designed to form three groups:

- 1) Background information questions (1-6)
- 2) Questions related to HHA network (7-13)
- 3) Questions related to social media behaviour (15-24)

The list of questions is presented in appendix 3.

Some background information was asked in the beginning of the survey to find out the categories that might explain the respondents' behaviour, such as relation to Haaga-Helia (e.g. student or alumna/alumnus), year of graduation and field of studies. As the survey will be published through several media, it is important to specify the group that the respondent belongs to.

The question will also provide additional information for at least later development work if the alumni association decides to extend its operations to the current students as well. If there are any differences between the students from different degree programs, further investigation can be carried out to find out the differences regarding how these groups are facilitated when they still are students. Additionally the object of their studies itself could explain the differences.

The international status has two perspectives: 1) the person has come from some other country to study at Haaga-Helia in Finland and 2) the person leaves for some other country after the studies have been completed. This international status is a key parameter with regards to this study as it tries to find out if there are any differences in the behaviour of people from either of these groups.

The respondents were asked some general questions about the alumni activities in order to map their expectations and experiences. Should these differ significantly from the goals the alumni unit has set, detailed procedures could be set to address the differences. In addition to the benefit expectations, it is important to find out if the alumni organisation in fact is known to the current or future (students) alumni. Presumably there are very potential low-hanging fruits if becomes evident that there is interest in the alumni activities, but people just don't know about it.

Events can be a good way to facilitate active engagement and interaction between the alumni and the association and so it is good to find out if the alumni actually are interested to attend the events. Perhaps resources could be utilised in a more effective way in some other activities, if events are not attractive to the alumni.

Discussions regarding possibly starting collecting donations from the alumni have been initiated, so the survey contained one question that aimed to identify if there are any targets towards which the alumni actually would be willing to donate. The question was worded in a way that did not distinguish, whose wallet would suffer from the donation (As

*an alumna/alumnus, would you in future consider financial donations (personally or through your company) towards any of the following goals? (select all that apply)).*

However, this format was reasoned based on the following points:

- 1) This was only a very preliminary survey on the topic.
- 2) It can be assumed that even donations through a company usually require an individual to initiate the action.
- 3) There would have been too much focus on the donation topic with two separate questions (it is now within the core scope of the study) and it would have made the survey too long (as it already now was quite long).

As stated above, the respondents were given the option to select several options if they wished.

The third group of questions concerned the behaviour in social media as it is one of the focal points in this study. The respondents first answered a technical question (*Do you have an account on any social media platform?*), in which a negative response would direct the survey to skip the remaining questions, as they would not have been relevant, and land on the final question to voluntarily give an email address for a possible follow-up interview.

The question set consisted of several general social media questions (which platform (and flexibility to use another), visiting frequency, language and possible redundant information in the feed) as well as questions specifically designed to assist in the honeycomb modelling (such as willingness to create content, online identity and reputational factors).

The survey results were analysed question by question as there were questions that have different data types. The responses were extracted from Webropol as a spreadsheet. Webropol automatically gives the results in a number-coded format. Alternatively Webropol would have offered its own tool for managing and illustrating the content, but based to the personal preferences and skills of the researcher, the option to extract the data was chosen.

Before the analysis, some modifications needed to be done. Several questions contained the option 'other' with a free text field, which meant that the responses to these questions with this category had to be reviewed and potentially further categorised. For instance, in question 3 some respondents had reported several fields of study in the 'other' option's free text field, but in order to categorise and simplify the results, only the one that they had mentioned first was selected. Already during the time the survey was open, it became



clear that not enough choices were given in the original list of options and the option 'Other' quickly became one of the most popular choices. Some of the missing fields of study mentioned most often in the free text field were added during the survey. It also might have been beneficial to clarify that the option does not need to match exactly with the degree program name and that for instance, as it seems these names have been changing and the list of all degree programs is truly excessive. Similarly some respondents had clarified that their degree program has a Finnish title. While it having known the exact degree program on that level of detail might have revealed some information of how for instance information had been distributed to the students of that particular program, it probably would not have benefited this study in particular. Furthermore, it might have posed a risk for the confidentiality of the study thus possibly limiting the disclosure of results for this question.

Some questions (for instance number 13) did not specify clearly enough that *local* meant local in their country of residence. Therefore some respondents chose their response based on the fact that they did not reside in Finland, where the assumed local event would have been taken place.

Some questions were analysed individually, but many were connected to answers in another question (eg. relation to Haaga-Helia with primary benefit expectation) to reveal dependencies between different groups. All other questions were processed as purely quantitative data (after the possible 'other' category had been restructured if needed), but question 7 (*What do you see as the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network?*) required methods for qualitative data processing.

The way of processing the answers to question 7 was only decided after the results had been collected. As the respondents had been given the freedom to answer anything with a free-text field, the results varied greatly. Therefore the most sensible option seemed to be categorisation. It consists of two activities, defining categories and assigning the data in suitable pieces into these categories (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 492-493). The categories mostly emerged from the data (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 493), whereby each answer was assigned with one or several keyword(s) (an issue) depending on the contents of the response. However, most likely the background information of the researcher concerning the Haaga-Helia strategies and peer-reviewed alumni network material impacted this categorisation. During the process some of the categories were combined to make one bigger entity and on the other hand some of the most popular keywords were split into smaller areas to make a more detailed distinction between different issues. The keywords were

chosen whenever possible to utilise the actual words in the responses (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 493).

The keywords were further unitised (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 493) so that each keyword represents one vote. Each respondent was entitled to give as many votes as they wished ('select all that apply'). Finally, a concept map was created of the keywords so the lowest level also contained some explanatory sub-points that had been vocalised in the responses but not selected as keywords.

In order to analyse the possible correlation between the results of Finnish and international respondents, Pearson correlation coefficient was used. This method can be used to evaluate the correlation between two datasets if the relationship is linear. The analysis will start with a scatter illustration of the datasets with each variable on one axis. The closer the points to a straight line, the stronger the correlation is. The further the points are from a straight line, the weaker the overall analysis with Pearson coefficient is. The significance of the correlation is tested by using t-test. (University of West England, 2016) In this thesis, the Pearson analysis was done on a selected questions with IBM SPSS Statistics software, available for the students of Haaga-Helia.

### **Charting the alumni sites in social media for other Finnish universities of applied sciences**

A short search has been conducted by searching the internet (the alumni associations' internet pages) and the respective social media sites to find out which social media platforms Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences are using. This search was done earlier than the analysis (in October 2015) and since these associations may have been developing their communication channels since then, the results in this study report might not be comprehensive.

### **4.3 Testing and evaluating the plan**

To take the results of the survey and strategy analysis one step closer to practical implementation, an implementation of one specific item was planned to be completed. This activity would verify that these action are implementable in reality. The testing of an item on the plan would be evaluated and the plan adjusted accordingly.

#### 4.4 Ethical issues and role of researcher

The study was conducted and reported with following ethical standards and responsibilities.

According to the pragmatist research philosophy the researcher can be part of the subject of the research and therefore subjective. Even though this is partly valid in a sense that the researcher is herself a potential future alumni – only not one that has moved to Finland from another country for education – undoubtedly the researcher has brought their own conception of culture and cultural differences as well as possibly interacting with the interviewees thus being part of the researchable subject. However, since there is no social interaction in survey type research, the researcher is able to distance themselves from the study topic in the main data collection method.

#### 4.5 Validity and reliability / dependability

To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, the actions listed in table 1 were used as a guideline during the study.

**Table 2. Validity criteria and related actions (Trochim 2006)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Actions for this study</b>
Internal validity	Monitor and evaluate with Mentor from the company that the results are believable.
External validity	Consider transferability by having a perspective to implement such practices in other alumni networks. Evaluate transferability in the thesis report.
Reliability	Report the initial context and the changes that take place during the study in the thesis report.
Objectivity	Conduct work reviews with both Mentors and other students to achieve a reasonable level of confirmability.

The survey was sent to the whole population of Haaga-Helia alumni, relevant students and international exchange students. This was done because expected response rate would not have been close to 100 % anyway, so there was no reason to rule out possible respondents. The response rate greatly influences the error margin and therefore reliability of the study. To achieve a 5 % error margin, a survey should be answered by approxi-

mately 350 respondents (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 219). There are some examples of survey studies in Northern American universities, where the response rate has been even 65 %, but generally 35 % response rate is adequate for an academic study (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 222).

For any statistical analysis to be robust enough, the sample size of each category to be analysed should be more than 30 in which case the sample follows the normal distribution. This is called a central limit theorem. (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 144)

Webropol system allows the survey to be sent to certain email addresses, in which case the risk of receiving false or duplicate responses would be smaller. However, since the survey was to be advertised for instance through Haaga-Helia social media, a generic URL had to be available for people not receiving or reading the email invitation. The responses were reviewed in order to aim to detect clearly invalid responses, although none was found.

## **5 Discussion**

This chapter consists of review of the HHA strategy as provided by HHA, analysis of the data collection results and consequential strategy item implementation plan (procedure).

### **5.1 Analysis of quantitative data: Current email solution**

As mentioned before, HHA has struggled with the current email solution in a sense that only a very low percentage of the alumni in the registry actually reads the newsletter. For instance the statistics from last two months of 2015 (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2016b) tell that the percentage of opening the newsletter was 32 % in November and 26 % in December. Even smaller is the number of links that were clicked within the newsletter (5 % in November, 16 % in December), but naturally this is highly dependent on the content of the newsletter. None of the news items were passed on, and in both months a few recipients decided to cancel their subscription. The vast majority of the recipients that read the newsletter did it during the day the newsletter was sent.

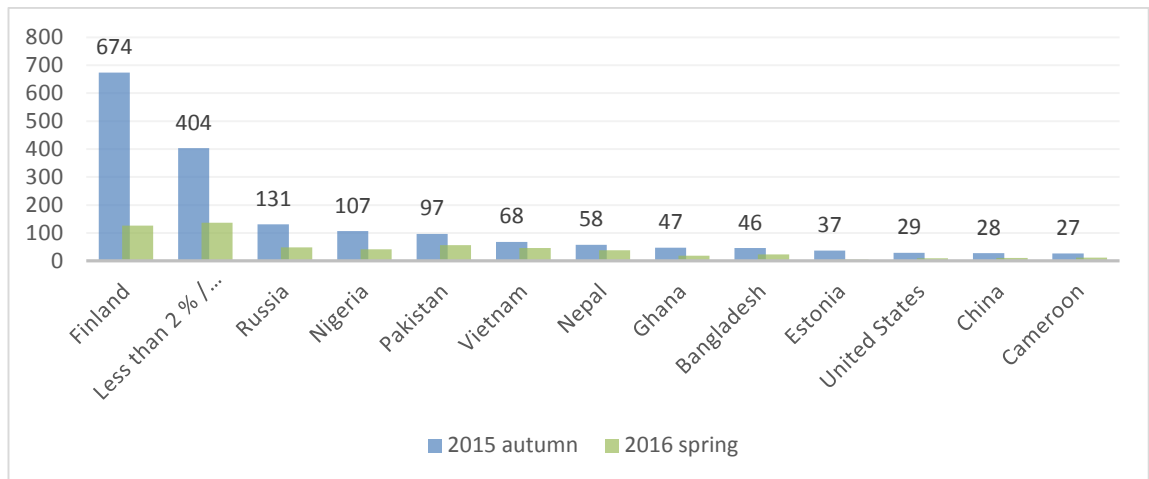
Roughly half of the readers were identified to be located in Finland (56 % in November and 57 % in December). Presumably this is done based on the reader's IP address, as no location info is provided to the service system. Therefore also around a third of the readers belong to a group, whose location could not be determined. All other locations form a smaller group than approximately 2 % of the recipients, which is a relatively small number of the international alumni. (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2016b)

### **5.2 Analysis of quantitative data: Country of origin and current location**

The country of origin is interesting topic from many perspectives. Firstly, it is valuable to know from which countries the applicants come from; this can indicate how well known Haaga-Helia is in these countries and would therefore also give clues to how marketing should be done in order to attract applicants. Secondly, in combination with the distribution of accepted candidates per country, this evaluation can be taken further to analyse in which countries the applicants are seriously making an effort to get accepted. Finally, the distribution of both the students and the alumni help to understand which countries and cultures should be considered when attempting to reach these individuals.

What is quite challenging from the perspective from this study is that the applicants come from 115 different countries. Naturally Finland is the biggest with a 38 % proportion of all applicants, but other than that, there are no countries, whose individual proportion would exceed 10 % of the applicants. The three next nationality groups are Russians (7 %), Ni-

gerians (6 %) and Pakistani (6 %). These numbers are taken from the statistics regarding the applicants looking to start their studies in autumn 2015. (Haaga-Helia Admissions Office 2015) The proportions are slightly different when looking at class of spring 2016, but this is likely due to the fact that autumn is largely considered as the main starting term (figure 14).



**Figure 14. Proportions of applicants per nationality (Haaga-Helia Admissions Office 2015)**

Current alumni registry is not a reliable source of information, despite the recent improvements in data quality performed by the Alumni Coordinator. Main reasons for this are that the data have been migrated through several systems over time (in addition to having some of the data in various spreadsheets) and that the process of updating the information is cumbersome and solely dependent on the alumni's own initiative. Moreover, the process of updating the contact information is fully manual, which is why the probability for errors is high. (Loippo-Sännälä, 2015)

The system does not have any clear way for keeping track of the members' country of residence, but it fully relies on each individual to actively inform HHA of their changed addresses. Moreover, as the registry has been moved from several systems during the years, some entries might have old addresses (from the time of their studies) but without any country information. So far this information has not been needed for any purpose. (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2016a)

Based on the alumni registry information the following can be reported

- 500 records do not have any address information
- 1 365 records do not have a social security number (which would enable attempting to obtain the address information from the Finnish Population Register Centre)

- 500 records have an address outside of Finland
- The remaining have a Finnish address (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2016a)

As a conclusion, there is no reliable way of getting a good overview of the Haaga-Helia alumni body as to where they currently are located.

### **5.3 Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data: Survey**

The analysis of the survey results is presented in this chapter.

The survey results can be split into three parts:

- 1) Background information questions (1-6)
- 2) Questions related to HHA network (7-13)
- 3) Questions related to social media behaviour (15-24)

Results are summarised for parts 1 and 2 (excluding question 7, which is presented in chapter 5.3.2), and the detailed results presented with graphs are in appendix 4.

The first set of questions can be reported without deeper analysis to form an understanding of the demographics of the respondents. However, the information given in these questions is used in combination with questions from sets number two and three in order to attempt to draw conclusions. Most of the results for these questions contain numerical data, but question 7 (*What do you see as the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network?*) contains only free text answers, which means that analysis requires some qualitative methods before any statistical analysis can be attempted.

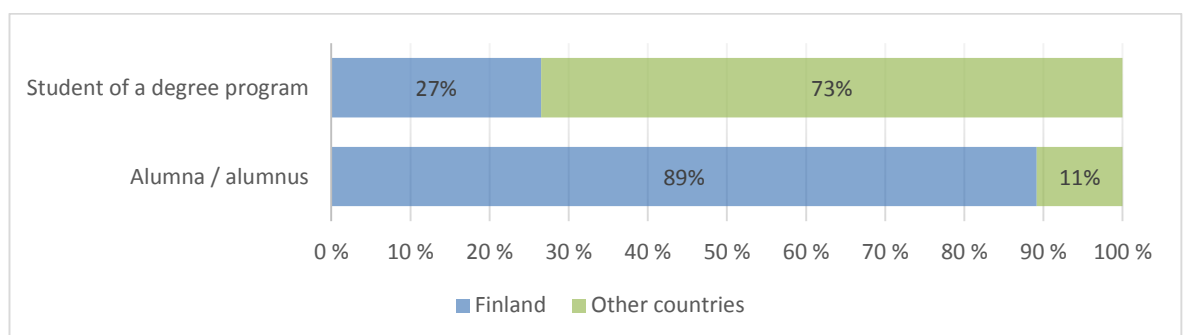
#### **5.3.1 Demographics, alumni network and general social media behaviour**

The total number of respondents was 557, of which vast majority (85 %, 470 respondents) were Haaga-Helia alumni. As the survey invitation was also published in Facebook in addition to the email to the alumni distribution list, it is a bit difficult to estimate the size of the total population. In theory all students and alumni (also the ones who currently are not members of the alumni network) have had the access to the survey, but on the other hand it is not reasonable to assume that everyone is both using Facebook and checking the Haaga-Helia Facebook page. Furthermore, it is not possible to cross-check who of the ones liking the Facebook page are also in the mailing list. However, one way to calculate the response rate would be to use the number of members with an email address (which is the same population as the recipients of the newsletter) in the HHA registry as the full population, which would yield a response rate of 3,9 % (470 out of 11 906). 94 % of the

respondents answered having to have received the invitation by email. The Webropol online service has counted that the survey has been opened 352 times without submitting the responses. Even though the response rate was extremely low, there were more than 350 respondents, which is why the error margin is 5 % or less (see chapter 4.5).

Only one of the respondents categorised themselves as neither student nor alumna/alumnus, while the remaining respondents were current students of Haaga-Helia (15 %, 83 respondents) or alumni (84 %). A few respondents stated being both a student and an alumna/alumnus under the 'other' option, but in the analysis of the results the first option was considered as their main status. Also some respondents seem to have associated the alumna/alumnus title as referring to the membership of the alumni network, as they had chosen the 'other' option, but specified in the comment having graduated from Haaga-Helia. Three respondents (1 %) did not reply.

Majority of the respondents are from Finland (444 out of 557; 80 %). Already these results show the difficulties with reaching the international alumni, as even though the students coming from other countries have been very active in taking the survey (73 %; 61 out of 83), the international alumni have not (only 51 out of 470; 11 %) (figure 15). Regarding the respondents' country of origin, only five countries were represented by more than 5 respondents: Finland (444; 80 %), Russia (30; 5 %), Vietnam (13; 2 %), Estonia (9; 2 %) and Italy (6; 1 %). This means that firstly, statistical evaluation is not likely to be accurate if the analysis were to be done on country basis and secondly, this might jeopardise the anonymity of the respondents. However, in addition to these, there are 55 respondents from 32 countries all over the world, who could be roughly divided by larger geographical areas for the sake of data analysis (figure 35 in appendix 4). Respondents originating from Finland have been excluded from these numbers.



**Figure 15. Proportion of respondents who are originally not from Finland (n = 557)**

What also is interesting from the HHA perspective is the current location of the international alumni. Naturally the students are currently located in Finland, but it also seems that



the vast majority (84 %) of the international alumni stay in Finland after their graduation; based on this survey (figure 36 in appendix 4). This view of course is likely to be biased based on the fact that the ones staying in Finland are more likely to stay connected to Haaga-Helia after their graduation as it is currently more relevant in Finland than in other countries. Therefore they are also more likely to respond to this survey than the ones that have left both Haaga-Helia and Finland. More details about the country is given in appendix 4.

As one of the goals for HHA is to set up a donations fund during 2015, the respondents were also asked about their willingness to donate money to any specific cause. As one respondent pointed out, the question was presented in a way that should potentially have been split into two separate questions (*As an alumna/alumnus, would you in future consider financial donations (personally or through your company) towards any of the following goals? (select all that apply)*), considering that it is a very much different activity to donate one's own money versus company's money. However, as explained in chapter 4.2.2, there was no need to separate the two options. Based on the results it seemed that a few respondents had considered the question from these two perspectives as they had responded both some causes as well as 'I would not donate any money'. Referring to the reasoning above the results were interpreted in a way that they *would* be willing to donate – even if it is only through a company, not from personal resources.

The result was that 63 % of the respondents were not willing to donate in any way towards Haaga-Helia. The attachment to the university might be indicated also in the proportions of alumni and students: 67 % of the alumni responded that they were not willing to donate, whereas from students only 39 % felt that way. Most votes in both categories collected options 'Scholarship fund or program' and 'Specific educational program'. The scarcity of international respondents again means that country-wise statistics cannot be analysed, but figure 37 in appendix 4 represents how respondents from different continents have answered. Finland was excluded in order to better see the differences between the other countries (continents).

Interestingly, the survey results show that even the alumni network members do not necessarily realise that they are members. Furthermore, there is a large number of students, who are interested in the alumni organisation, but do not know what it is (see figure 42 in appendix 3). Given that the interest of the international alumni is easily lost after graduation, gaining their attention already during the studies seems vital in order to preserve the relationship.

The respondents were mostly expecting networking and professional benefits from the alumni network. Understandably, students were also interested in learning about career paths and career opportunities. When looking at the results based on the continents, there are no big differences, the biggest in all is still networking. It would seem that there are differences with in the expectation of African respondents, but the number of respondents is so low that no conclusions can be drawn based on these results. The breakdown of primary benefit expectation per continent is presented in figure 44 (in appendix 4).

Overall the respondents did not feel motivated by the face-to-face events (figure 46 in appendix 4). Both in Finland and in other countries the email is the main preferred method of communication with the alumni network (figure 47 in appendix 4).

Before the questions related to the social media behaviour, the respondents were asked if they have an account on any social media platform. 8 % of the respondents selected 'no', after which they were directly sent to the last question asking about the possibility for an interview.

According to the results, the most popular social media platform for professional purposes is LinkedIn (61 % of all respondents) (figure 48 in appendix 4). Facebook was the second with 30 % share of respondents. Unlike the preliminary data collected (see chapter 3.4.4), other named platforms collected only nominal votes: Google (1), Instagram (2), VKontakt (1) and Xing (1). The respondents were not very eager to start using other social media platforms, but only a fraction would completely turn their backs on HHA in case their preferred platform was not used (figure 50 in appendix 4). Social media sites are mostly checked daily or weekly (figure 51 in appendix 4). English was deemed as an acceptable language (figure 53 in appendix 4), and most respondents would not be bothered by posts in other languages (figure 52 in appendix 4).

### **5.3.2 Survey, question 7 (purpose of HHA)**

The graphs related to the results for question 7 are presented in appendix 4. As described in chapter 4.2.2, the results of the question 7 were first categorised based on keywords, then unitised and finally added to a concept map. As the purpose of the alumni network in the context of this study is global concept and not dependent on the country/culture, the nationality and the current country of residence perspective is not considered in the analysis. Figure 38 and figure 39 (in appendix 4) represent the word cloud and word map of the results for question 7. These illustrations are directly taken from the Webropol online survey tool.

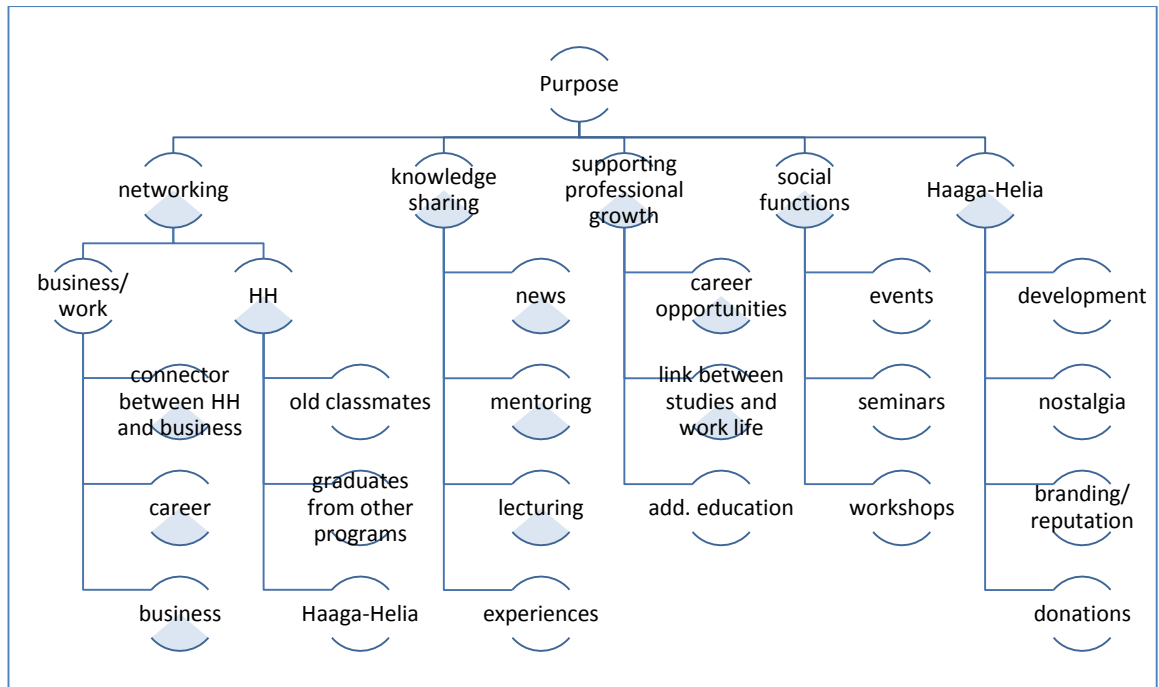
A further analysis (as described above) resulted in 5 top level concepts: networking, sharing knowledge and information, professional growth, social functions and Haaga-Helia. Additionally a category was added for results that did not contain any answer that would have yielded a keyword. Figure 40 (in appendix 4) shows the frequency in which these top level concepts were observed in the data.

While there were some positive comments (“*It is good. Really active and good Connections.*”), quite a big number of respondents gave an answer under the category of responses without keywords, which then ended up being the second most popular of the top level groups taking almost a quarter of the ‘votes’ (figure 41 in appendix 4). Furthermore, while 74 % (122) of those respondents have simply left the field empty (part of them most likely just considered it be too time-consuming to answer to a free text question), 20 % of them have taken the time to answer ‘I don’t know’ and 6 % ‘no purpose’.

Im [sic] a third year student and I will graduate in spring 2016. I have, before this, never ever heard that there is something called Haaga-Helia Alumni network, and I have no idea of what they do or what it is.

I don't feel it as my own and I don't feel welcome.

The full concept map is presented in figure 16. The circles with a light blue segment represent actual keywords that were identified during the categorisation process, whereas the circles without colouring are topics that were mentioned in some of the comments. These topics were raised to the concept map to clarify what type of answers were found among that category. It must be noted that not all comments were unambiguous and therefore this is only one possible representation of the concepts. Furthermore there are several items that could be listed under several top level categories – or alternatively a three-dimensional map could be created. For instance mentoring could be also added under ‘*supporting professional growth*’ as presumably the mentor also learns a thing or two during the process. However, for simplification purposes each item has only been listed once in the concept map.



**Figure 16. Concept map of the keywords and sub-keywords in question 7**

Networking was the most popular keyword, and in fact it was often used separately without any specification regarding what in particular was meant with ‘networking’ or in which context that was referred to. Albeit, the same vagueness was used in the following question 8, where one of the options was “networking and professional benefits”. As can be seen from the responses, networking can for instance be seen from two perspectives: from one of a job hunter or one looking for employees. Another point-of-view would be to consider the nature of that relationship: networking can refer to maintenance of existing network of connection, but it can also refer to either very superficial exchange of business cards (or friendship/connection over a virtual network) or a very purposeful networking that truly aims to achieve a business or employment relationship.

Some respondents, however, specified the purpose of networking in which case a specific keyword could be assigned, e.g. “*Creating a professional network to support career [sic] development, job opportunities and to support students who are about to graduate*”. The ‘business/work’ category was added under top level networking category to create a structure that matches the other sub-category, ‘HH’. This category could have been split into three separate keywords, but it seemed that quite often at least two of these were mentioned together in a comment and so at the time it seemed that it would have added an unnecessary layer of complexity to the analysis. Some of the answers that were tagged with this keyword were:

Keep in touch with the happenings at Haaga-Helia and other alumni.

To connect with past and future students and professionals from Haaga- Helia

To keep alumni updated on the school's development and events; to connect alumni to the school's current students and use that connection as a source of potential talents for projects/job opportunities provided by alumni; to connect with other alumni around the world for business/personal related matters.

Some of the comments contained the phrase “to keep in touch with Haaga-Helia”, which could be interpreted in two ways: either one-directional flow of information from Haaga-Helia towards the alumni or a bi-directional and interactive relationship between the two parties. In this these two have been distinguished so that ‘keep in touch’ refers to the latter whereas the first type of situation has been categorised under ‘sharing of knowledge and information’, for instance “*To be informed about what is going on in my previous school*”.

The last two categories were so small in volume that there was no sense in splitting them to smaller sub categories, but some of the topics were raised to the concept map to give an idea of what type of things were mentioned. While the number of ‘votes’ in this category is relatively small and many of the comments considered this question more from Haaga-Helia’s perspective (promotion, marketing, reputation), some of the points raised probably would make a big difference in getting the alumni emotionally attached to Haaga-Helia even after the studies.

To keep graduated students connected with the university by continuing providing knowledge to graduates. In return the uni will receive knowledge about real life organisations outside the uni, thesis opportunities for students, guest speakers and donations. This is how it works in proper alumni networks e.g. in UK where I also belong. I feel proud to be a member of one of the university alumni network in UK, but I don't feel the same with HH's network - HH alumni doesn't give anything for me.

According to Sirota’s 3-M model for employee engagement (figure 6) in order to reach engagement it is vital for the members of the community to feel achievement (proudness of what they do), camaraderie (warm atmosphere and sense of community) and equity (being treated equally). Based on the results Haaga-Helia and HHA would probably benefit from internal face lift among the students, whereby the students and alumni were to gain better sense of belonging. Considering for instance Universities of Cambridge, Oxford or Harvard – probably there is no one who does not feel proud to be an alumna or alumnus of these universities. The Bingham University (2015) alumni association has reached the same conclusion when defining the strategic goals as one of them reads “*Create spirit and pride in Binghamton University*”. Naturally these type of tasks do not solely lie on the hands of an alumni association, but rather it is a challenge for the entire institution to overcome.

### 5.3.3 Survey, social media behaviour (honeycomb)

Social media strategy can be created with the honeycomb model by (see 3.4.3)

- 1) Conducting a honeycomb analysis and charting of the social media landscape
- 2) Define strategies and goals for the most important blocks
- 3) Plan who facilitates and creates content, when and how
- 4) Monitor and adjust according to social media ecology and company strategies

The survey results provide valuable information for the analysis of the honeycomb model for HHA. The outcome of the analysis is presented in figure 17, which shows the importance of each block by the intensity of the colour. The three most significant blocks are relationships, identity and reputation.

Based on results in question 7 (see chapter 5.3.1), the most valued purpose for HHA is networking, with mostly a very distinctive, often self-promoting purpose (career and professional advancement), which would indicate that the relationships block is the most significant of all the blocks. The number of connections (figure 54 in appendix 4) the respondents report having also supports this presumption. Since this thinking is also in line with the HHA strategy for 2015 it can be stated that the relationship block is one of the main reasons for HHAs existence and must be addressed in social media strategy.

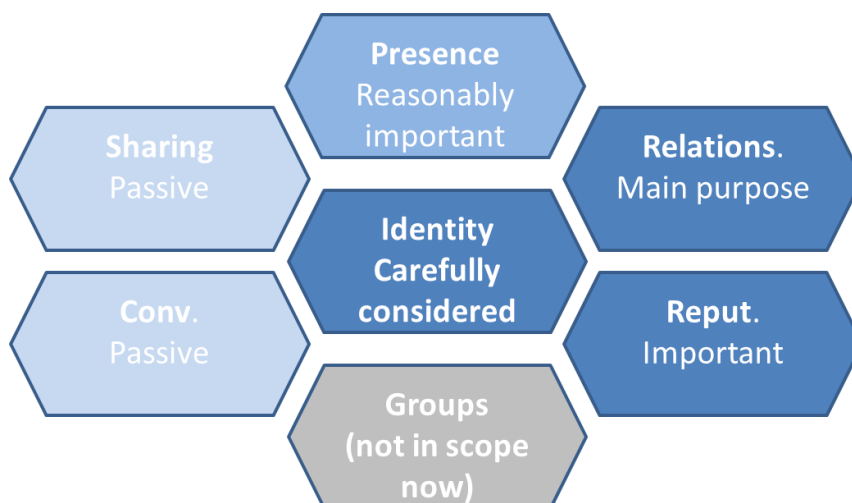
Most of the respondents reported having either restricted (58 %) or professional (20 %) online identity. This would imply that they are very particular concerning the identity and would probably prefer a platform where identity modification or profile creation is easily available.

The results for question regarding the social media platform are fairly nicely distributed over the normal distribution, but there is a slight (albeit not necessarily statistically significant) leaning towards the important scale (figure 56 in appendix 4), with average of 3,4/5 (1 being very important, 5 not important). However, this issue with reputation or image can also be seen in the results to question 7, where relatively large number of respondents either responded with “no purpose” or “I don’t know”. As the alumni network currently is struggling to engage its members, one solution could be to improve the reputation – or at least consider the reputation aspect in the social media strategy. A good reputation would make it easier for the alumni to attach themselves to Haaga-Helia emotionally as they could feel and share the pride they have for their alma mater.

Again the importance of real-time availability of other users resulted in a normal distribution of responses, but with a slight leaning towards 'slightly important' (figure 57 in appendix 4), with average of 4,1/5 (1 being very important, 5 not important). This could be taken into account in the social media strategy by facilitating real-time communication. This functionality is available in Facebook, but not in LinkedIn, although a workaround could be to set regular chat sessions with for instance Alumni Coordinator or recruiting Managers from partner companies.

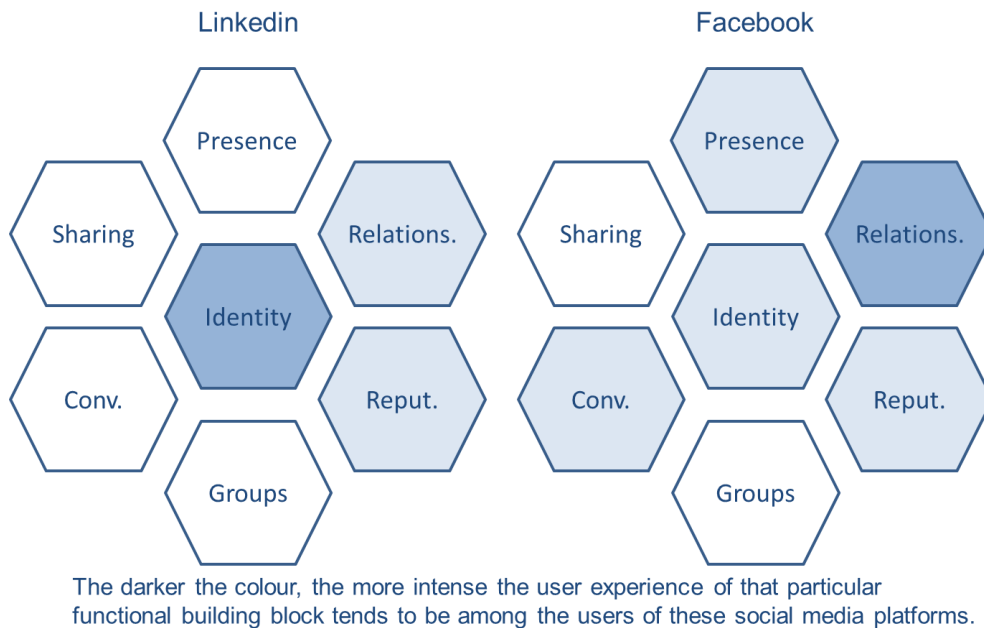
Finally, the users were asked about their willingness to create content and while some had no interest in networking over social media or with other Haaga-Helia alumni, majority responded being ready to contribute passively (read, receive info, accept connections, occasionally initiate activities; 55 %) or moderately (read, sometimes discuss, share professional info, accept and propose connections; 29 %) (figure 58 in appendix 4). Thereby neither conversations nor sharing are their primary objectives in social media, which means that the priority of the respective blocks can be downplayed in the strategy. This is not to say that content would be irrelevant or unnecessary, but rather that in the facilitation the possibilities for interaction between the alumni does not have to be the main concern.

The final functional block of the honeycomb model (groups) (figure 17) was not included in the survey, since although possible country-specific sub groups are very much in the scope of this study, the need for them was to be evaluated based on the other answers. While division in sub groups based on for instance professional field or interest would later be relevant, when HHA has evolved from the current status, the direction currently should be rather to form a one unified group or community than artificially even propose splitting the members.



**Figure 17. Honeycomb social media model for HHA (according to Kietzmann *et al.* 2011 and the survey)**

When this outcome in figure 17 is compared to the respective honeycombs of LinkedIn and Facebook (which were the two most popular social media sites according to the survey results), both seem to provide a relatively good match. While LinkedIn's most significant block is identity (presumably as it is extremely important to give a certain image of oneself for professional purposes), Facebook is more focused on building relationships perhaps in a bit more informal setting with real-time presence and conversations (figure 18).



**Figure 18. Main honeycomb areas for LinkedIn and Facebook (Kietzmann et al. 2011, 248)**

#### 5.3.4 Potential actions, emerged from the survey

Based on the most popular social media sites among the respondents, HHA should consider both Facebook and LinkedIn in its social media strategy. Since HHA – according to a decision by Haaga-Helia communications department – does not have its own Facebook user profile or site, the activities would mostly be monitoring or megaphone through the official Haaga-Helia Facebook site or the unofficial campus sites. If HHA can use other platforms to build a strong online identity, it could attract some *magnet* type (see chapter 3.4.1) of social media communication. Not having a HHA Facebook profile means that even though the relationship (the strongest characteristic of Facebook) cannot be utilised to the full extent, HHA can contribute to building an admirable reputation in Facebook. The members will have the possibility of using their profiles, i.e. online identity to support their own agenda.



LinkedIn on the other hand offers better possibilities for networking as HHA has its own closed group in LinkedIn. According to the survey, this is the most often preferred professional site, and therefore the content can be planned in a way that supports this purpose. Whenever a partner company is looking for new recruits, the representative of the company could be allowed to join the group (either permanently or temporarily) to publish the job advertisement and to answer any questions. Likewise the members of the group could be encouraged to post ads if they are looking for new career moves.

As based on the survey it is clear that the physical events are not very motivating for the alumni to get engaged – even though the main purpose of these events often is networking (the most valued purpose of HHA) – a virtual networking session could be tested and evaluated to address the need of relationship building, knowledge sharing and professional growth. For instance Northeastern University's alumni association has initiated a series of virtual networking hours, whereby alumni log into a web platform called Brazen Careerist. They choose a topic they are interested and the tool pairs them with another alumnus or alumna, who also is interested in the same topic. These two can then have a short chat (8 minutes), move on to the next person. (Martin 2015) Naturally this platform comes with a price tag, but one (less expensive) possibility could be to engage for instance in group discussions in LinkedIn. A few active alumni, assigned as facilitators, would publish the first posts in the group and the others could join in the commenting. Also one option could be invite alumni or partner companies to host a webcast, perhaps regarding current trends, inspirational people or interesting companies. For instance StartUp School might have some students, who are interested to present their company and get good tips in exchange. Students could join in by sending questions or engaging in a chat during the webcast. There would be costs in broadcasting the webcast, but the partner companies could be asked to sponsor – or they might even have the resources to produce the whole thing. Facebook offers a possibility for group chats, but discussions in LinkedIn comments is not the most user-friendly solution. However, there are even free online chat platforms available, that could be utilised for this purpose in case Haaga-Helia does not have a suitable option.

Other ways for building a positive reputation could be to openly celebrate successes related to Haaga-Helia. News about alumni, who have been nominated to a good position or who have achieved something professionally, could be posted on the LinkedIn group page in addition to the Haaga-Helia Facebook site. Similarly, alumni could be informed in case Haaga-Helia has been successful for instance in the fields of education or research.

One way to contribute to building the reputation is to publish statistics of the network. In order to continuously monitor the success of the social media plan, HHA should track the activity levels regularly (Reynolds 2012). This can be done by measuring the posts, comments, likes, amount of visitors, number of newsletter readers or how many new alumni have got a new job through the network, how many new alumni have joined the network and how many new company representatives have joined the network. This information could in the beginning be released irregularly or with a reasonably sparse frequency in order to ensure adequately impressive data content. HHA should conduct a review of social media effectiveness on a yearly basis to align the tasks with the current activity level and the updated directives.

Likewise in the spirit of knowledge sharing and professional growth, HHA could ask for members of the alumni network to give insight to what it is like to work in a certain profession, in a certain company or in a certain country (from professional perspective). Such interviews have in the past been published in the HHA intranet pages ("Uratarinat"), which means that they have been very passive and perhaps difficult to come across. In the new format they could be published as blog posts (or if the creator would prefer, as vlogs) to the LinkedIn group and also in the HHA internet pages. It would be good to agree with the creator to monitor the discussion for a few days after posting, which might also generate some positive activity within the group. This gives the person posting a good opportunity to bring out their online identity in addition to possible new connections.

The Alumni Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that new information is posted to the needed social media sites according to the schedule, meaning that something is posted on a weekly basis at the minimum. As this task requires quite a lot of attention, it might be best to delegate this task to someone else, for instance to social media ambassadors (see chapter 3.4.6).

**Table 3. Social media tasks based on honeycomb model**

Platform	LinkedIn	Facebook
Update frequency	Weekly	As needed
Facilitate network of HH alumni	Always	No
Invite recruiters@Partners to join the group	As needed	No
Publish open jobs ads from Partners	As needed	Yes
Facilitate Alumni virtual networking	2/ term (or some other)	Only post
Celebrate achievements	As needed	As needed
Celebrate successful alumni	As needed	As needed
Publish statistics	As needed	As needed
Blogpost: a day in the life of...	2 / term	Only post

### 5.3.5 Correlation of survey datasets

As one of the key questions in this study is to find out whether the international alumni require some special attention, it is relevant to look at the possible correlation between the responses among Finnish and international students as they have been presented in chapter 5.3. The correlation has not been evaluated for each question separately, since the dataset of international students is very limited for which reason it most likely does not depict the full truth of the situation anyway.

The results have been presented in two dimensions: their country of origin (Finland – other countries) and the relation to HHA (alumni – students). As there were very few international alumni who actually have moved away from Finland since graduation, the correlation is calculated based on the country of origin rather than country of current residence. The correlation has been calculated with the SPSS statistics tool using the Pearson correlation analysis.

The aim of this analysis was to find out whether there is some correlation between the answers in the two categories or whether they are different in such a way that the answers of each category could be considered independent from each other. By no means would this mean causality (since group A are answering one way, group B must answer the same way), the underlying reasons affecting one group's answers might have the same

impact on the other group's answers. In the context of this study a strong correlation might imply that international and Finnish students for instance have the same expectations towards the alumni activities and therefore these two groups do not need to be treated differently.

The Pearson analysis is only reliable if the points of data are on a linear curve when the dataset is illustrated with one variable is on x and the other is on y axis. As can be seen from figure 59 for question 7 (purpose of HHA) or from figure 61 for question 8 (primary benefit expectation), the datasets have relatively small number of points and furthermore these points are not clearly linearly arranged although the average trend line indicates rather strong correlation.

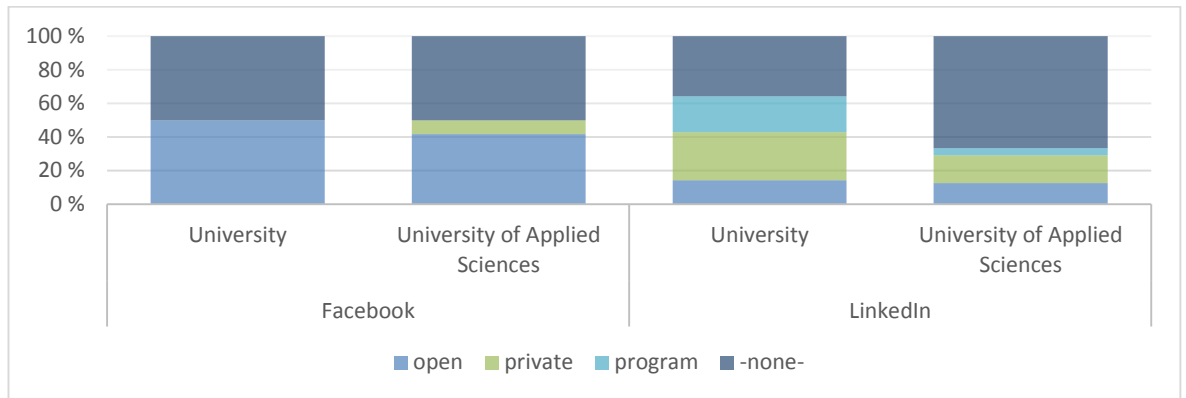
Figure 60 represents the correlation calculations for the top level category votes for question 7. Based on the analysis there is strong correlation with the two sets, which would suggest that the international and Finnish students have voted in a similar way.

The same phenomena can be seen in the dimension alumni – students, as shown in figure 62. The results for the primary benefit expectation (question 8) seem to correlate between students and alumni.

Based on these results of these groups in the two dimensions are behaving similarly and there are no significant differences that would need to be considered. Therefore it is likely that improving the engagement of alumni overall, would also improve the engagement of the international alumni. However, as mentioned before, the dataset is flawed in a way that the number of respondents coming from other countries than Finland who also currently reside outside of Finland is extremely low, which means that one segment of respondents is practically missing making this a weak argument.

#### **5.4 Charting the social media platforms in Finnish universities**

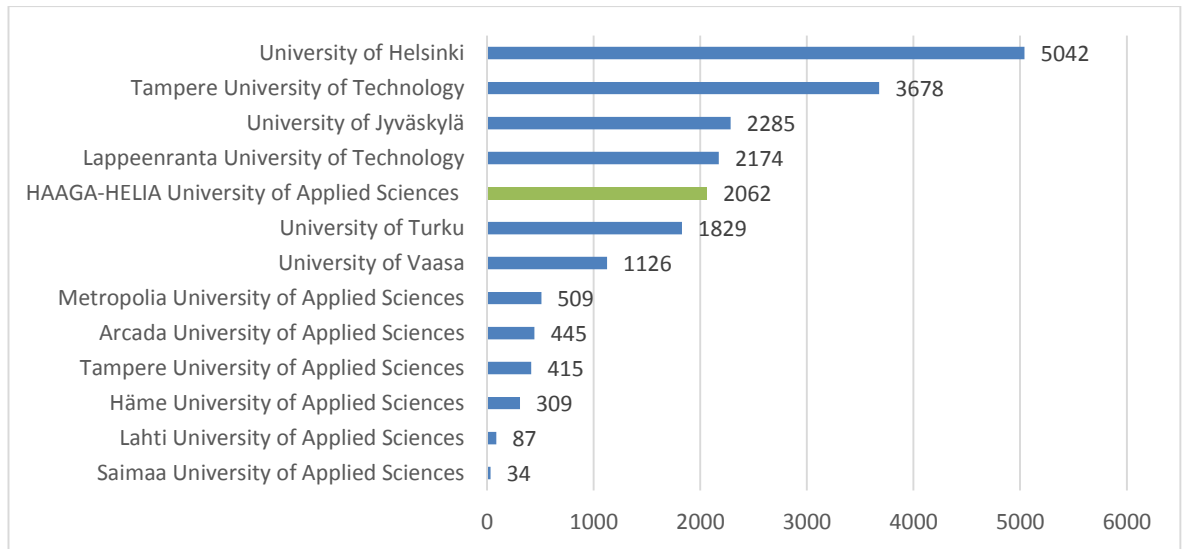
In order to get an overall view of the used practices in Finland, a short study was conducted within the Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences. The results revealed that 34 % of the alumni organisations do not have any social media platform (figure 19). The most used platforms were Facebook (50 %) and LinkedIn (34 %). 32 % of the organisations had both Facebook and LinkedIn site. Two alumni organisations had an account in Pinterest as well and two also a Twitter account. Some alumni groups in LinkedIn were dedicated to certain study programmes – these were not accounted for in the above statistics but they are visible in figure 19.



**Figure 19. Alumni organisations of Finnish universities that have a site in Facebook or LinkedIn**

In most cases the language used in the Facebook pages was Finnish, which inclines that these pages are not primarily aimed at reaching international students. Most of the LinkedIn pages were private, which means that it was not possible to evaluate the content or language, but based on the introduction page, which is accessible for everyone, the content was either in English or both in Finnish and English, which would give better possibilities of engaging the international alumni. Almost all universities (89 %) had a page or site within the internet pages of the university and usually alumni were requested to sign up to the alumni network, which suggests that these organisations keep a registry of their alumni and possibly use email (or printed, as in University of Helsinki alumni association) information letters to contact the members.

Since the Facebook pages are open, there is no simple way to calculate how many alumni they are attracting, but in LinkedIn the numbers of members is available to everyone also for private groups. These numbers are presented in figure 20. In most cases the number of members in the alumni association were not available, but as an example the alumni association of University of Helsinki (2015) has a member counter in their internet pages and based on that only 21 % of the alumni belong to the LinkedIn group. For Haaga-Helia the LinkedIn alumni page that collects all users stating Haaga-Helia as their alma mater, lists 8 234 users, graduated between 1980 and 2015, which means that only 25 % of potential users belong to the official alumni group.



**Figure 20. Number of members in alumni group (LinkedIn)**

Information was collected for 14 Finnish universities (Ministry of Education and culture 2015b) and 24 universities of applied sciences (Ministry of Education and culture 2015a). The statistics were charted based on the information found on the alumni pages of the university in question, as well as with a search in Facebook, LinkedIn and Google (for Twitter). Only sites dedicated to the alumni organisations were accounted for; in addition or instead the schools might have their own social media platforms. Naturally it is possible that the alumni organisations have such a closed method for reaching their alumni that it is not visible for the general public, in which case this study would not give accurate picture of the reality. Also the statistics given above are direct numbers without applying any statistical analysis.

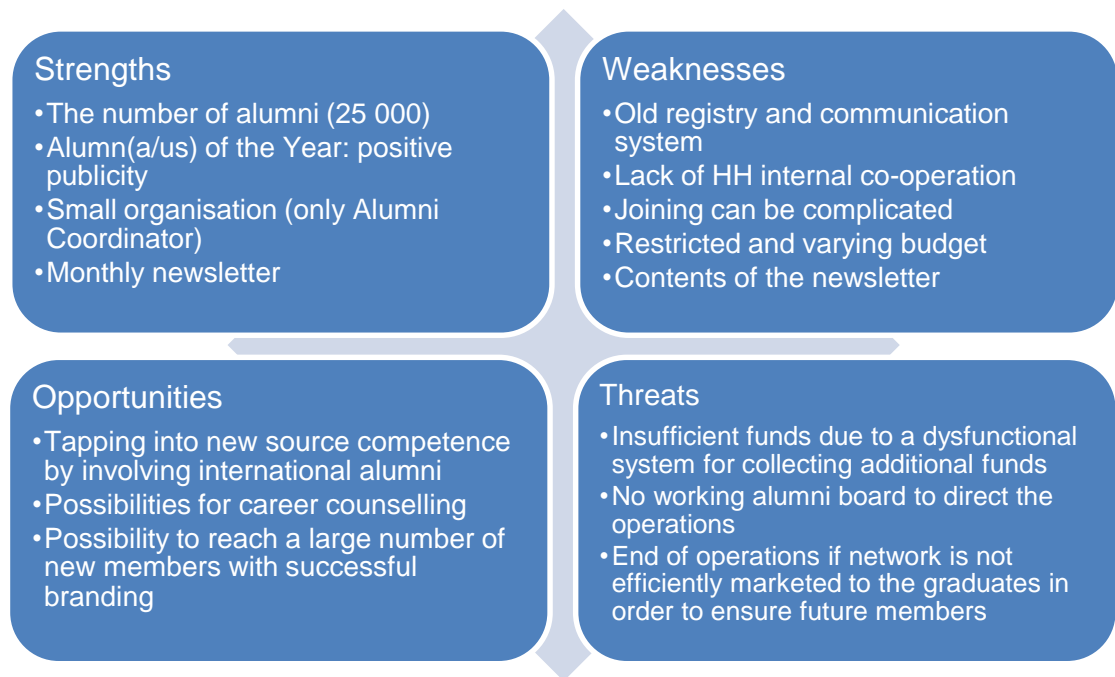
If the alumni are not interested in networking in the general social media sites, the university can of course create their own site for alumni purposes. There are examples of 'trial & errors' (Lavrusik 2009), but for instance University of Helsinki have created their own networking site, Helsinki Alumni Connect (<https://helsinkialumniconnect.org>), which the alumni can join without joining the alumni association, which requires a payment of member fee. This network is restricted for alumni, students and employees. (University of Helsinki 2016)

### **5.5 Review of the HHA network's policies and clarification of the purpose**

Haaga-Helia Alumni does not have its own strategy, but instead it is decided that Haaga-Helia has one strategy and the units will have directives, policies, goals and action plans under the umbrella of this Haaga-Helia strategy.

### 5.5.1 Environmental scanning: SWOT

As for the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the HHA has identified the following items (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2015; translated from Finnish):



**Figure 21. SWOT analysis of Haaga-Helia Alumni (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2015)**

From this study's perspective some comments could be raised regarding the SWOT. While it certainly is a strength that the organisation is small (it is flexible and low-maintenance), it is also a weakness. Especially in terms of social media; active engagement also requires that the administrators of a page or account are themselves present in the social media and ready to respond to the emerging activities. When there is only one person available, who has lots of other assignments that mere social media, there are risks that first of all not enough content can be generated and secondly that the response time is not quick enough. There are good tools to efficiently manage several social media platforms, but the more sites, the bigger the effort needed to monitor the activities. One sign of this reluctance to commit within Haaga-Helia is also the type of the employment of Alumni Coordinator: the current Coordinator is employed with a fixed-term contract until the end of 2016.

It could be argued that several (if not all) of the weaknesses stem from the fact that the purpose and the value of the alumni network is not fully understood (or agreed) throughout the organisation. If there is a clear reason why Haaga-Helia wants to invest in alumni relations and it is clear to all personnel in the institution, there should be no difficulties in

keeping the alumni registry up-to-date or at least organised, in increasing the internal marketing (unlike the current situation), in allocating adequate funding and in making the purpose clear to the future (and current) alumni.

One major weakness that should be added to the list is the exclusion of students to that extent, that even the students, who are about to graduate don't know what alumni network is (see survey results below). Since students are the future alumni, they should be at least be very aware of the alumni network from the very beginning of their studies. Denying this information from the students contributes greatly to the threat of possible end of operations mentioned above. Furthermore, a well-functioning alumni network, which is also benefiting students, could be used as an advantage when marketing the school to new potential students.

On the other hand, based on the survey (see results below) many former students appreciate the possibility to connect to the old classmates and Haaga-Helia, which definitely should be mentioned in the strengths. Perhaps the full registry of 25 000 alumni is not completely reliable strength due to the issues with the data quality, but with very straightforward extrapolation it might be possible that there are at least closer to 6 000 alumni (126 out of 557 respondents) who somehow make the association back to the alma mater.

Regarding opportunities, because HHA is in a relatively immature state with regards to social media, it offers good possibilities to increase not only the alumni body but also the profile of Haaga-Helia. While for instance Haaga-Helia's official Twitter account is actively posting content, the mass of followers is fairly modest, and so activating the alumni in social media would most likely benefit the institution as a whole.

### **5.5.2 Strategy formulation**

All unit specific (including alumni services) policies and procedures are ultimately based on Haaga-Helia's top level strategy and activity roadmap for 2016. In this roadmap alumni activities have specifically been mentioned within the objective that aims to provide high quality education with a human touch by encouraging co-operation and enthusiasm (*"Laadukas koulutus ihmisläheisesti: Osallistava ja innostava yhdessä tekeminen toimintatapana "uusi ammattilaisuus"*).

This objective has been defined with a number of strategies, three of which are related to alumni activities. Strategies have been specified for the following three years (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2015, translated from Finnish):



2016: Teaching in teams to be incorporated to the new curricula. Development of service centre concept ("*Uusien OPSien kautta toteutuva tiimiopettajuus. Palvelukeskus-konseptin jatkokehittäminen*")

2017: Business involved in all teaching; alumni mentoring ("*Työelämä mukana kaikessa opetustoiminnassa, alumnimentorointi*")

2018: Haaga-Helia is an enabler of development networks for students ("*Haaga-Helia on opiskelijalle kehittämisverkostojen mahdollistaja*")

### **Purpose and mission**

Even though HHA does not have its own strategy, it is beneficial to consider the purpose of the alumni network and write a mission statement that summarises the purpose of HHA.

An interview with the Alumni Coordinator (Loippo-Sännälä 2015) revealed the purpose of the alumni network to mainly be (but not limited) to

- organise and promote further education in Haaga-Helia
- market education to potential students in other countries
- offer customised training or education programmes for companies
- offer eMBA programmes
  
- support and improve employment of new graduates of Haaga-Helia
- enhance professional development of Haaga-Helia graduates
  
- build a mentoring network of former students of Haaga-Helia
- recruit visiting lecturers to Haaga-Helia courses
- strengthen networking both amongst former students as well as between the students and alma mater

These points are somewhat in line with the responses that the respondents gave in the survey (see chapter 5.3.2), albeit that Haaga-Helia's perspective to grow the education business was not in focus in the answers.

Therefore the mission statement of HHA could be formulated as follows:

*The mission of the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences Alumni Network is to connect the Haaga-Helia alumni with each other, the University and business, to engage them all with purposeful and mutually beneficial activities, and to facilitate lifelong professional and personal growth and business networking.*

To improve the current operations, HHA has listed the several improvement areas (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2015):

- Strengthening of the alumni community and interactive communication with the alumni (networking)
- Engaging the alumni with Haaga-Helia education opportunities and latest events in the field of research
- Enforcing mentoring as a part of the professional growth for both the mentor and the mentee
- supporting the students and developing well-functioning co-operation with the student organisations
- enhancing the support system for graduates and creating a report concerning the professional life of a graduate
- improving the ways to organise this volunteer work and developing ways to engage participants
- Enhancing the role of alumni, as source of feedback and quality auditor as well as in development of alumni operations
- Setting up an alumni fund
- Enforcing the communication with interesting events both in Finland and in other countries

(Haaga-Helia Alumni 2015; translated from Finnish)

### **Action plan and policies**

HHA has further specified a plan, based on the Haaga-Helia strategy, for the year 2016, which contains the following policies (Haaga-Helia 2015, translated from Finnish):

- Alumni and recruitment services serve the entire Haaga-Helia as well as the external stakeholders such as partner companies and associations.
- Alumni and recruitment services facilitate professional growth of the alumni. The aim is to improve the co-operation with business partners by embarking upon collaboration projects.
- Alumni and recruitment services improve the internal and external communication regarding the services as well as all communication related to alumni operations.
- Alumni and recruitment services maintain recruitment pages for students and develops the recruitment services provided for students
- The alumni and recruitment services are made more visible by being present in the campuses in co-operation with career counselling and other partners.
- The alumni services maintain registry of all alumni and a database of active alumni. The aim is to activate especially the international alumni network in co-operation with the Haaga-Helia international services.
- Alumni services continues to develop the mentoring program and professional growth of the alumni.

- Alumni services evaluates ways to collect donations and funding, and develops its brand by creating an alumni space and wall of fame on the Haaga-Helia campuses.

(Haaga-Helia 2015, translated from Finnish)

## **Engagement**

Based on the literature (see chapter 3.2), the alumni directives the discussions with the Alumni Coordinator the alumni engagement for HHA consists of three segments. Firstly an engaged alumni would ensure that their contact information in the alumni registry are always updated (at least email). Additionally this person would have joined all relevant groups in social media that HHA maintains. In order to keep oneself informed, at the least they would read the e-Signals and with reasonable intensity other media.

The second activity segment contains getting involved in alumni activities. Contribution to the content creation in the social media and interaction with other alumni – both online, but also offline in alumni events – characterise an engaged alumni. Furthermore they are interested and actively involved in knowledge sharing and supporting the professional growth of other alumni. One form of this is mentoring.

Finally, extremely engaged or committed alumni pay major contribution back to the alumni network and Haaga-Helia. They give donations, actively propose and organise collaborations with companies and in anyway invest significant amounts of time or money to the development of Haaga-Helia, its alumni network and the alumni.

## **5.6 Overall strategy implementation plan: procedures for HHA**

This chapter describes the strategic procedures that emerge from the data collection results.

### **5.6.1 Main conclusions from data collection**

The challenge concerning international alumni begins with the identification. Since it is very difficult to keep the alumni registry and especially the respective address data updated, currently it is not even possible unequivocally state, which of the alumni are located outside of Finland. Furthermore, the phenomena that the majority of the respondents that originate outside of Finland continue to live in Finland after graduation adds one more layer of complexity: what actually constitutes the international alumni?

Based on the survey results, there does not seem to be significant differences between the Finnish and international students as one group. However, it must be noted that the

survey most likely did not reach the very alumni whose input would have been crucial in the analysis of the situation, which is also why this study cannot provide any specific instructions regarding how the alumni from a particular country should be addressed separately. Furthermore, it doesn't even seem reasonable with the current resources to start with focusing on countries separately, especially when the respondents do not get any particular motivation from physical events or seminars. Nonetheless, it would most likely also improve the engagement of international alumni, if the alumni activities in general are improved.

The definition of 'alumnus' according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is

1: a person who has attended or has graduated from a particular school, college, or university

Based on this definition the status of alumnus or alumna (a feminine form of alumnus) does not require that the person actually has graduated from the school in question. By definition, therefore, all students already are alumni.

However, each university has the right to define themselves, who actually are alumni from their perspective and that, in fact, varies greatly among institutions. For instance, Maastricht University has specified that an alumni must have graduated from one of its degree programmes or obtained a doctoral degree, whereas University of Tampere considers anyone who has previously been a student or an employee of University of Tampere an alumnus or alumna. While University of Tampere has now the access to a larger population, the Maastricht University has taken a clear branding standpoint, as the reputation of the university might improve if only graduates are allowed as alumni. Naturally there are doubts whether it is sensible to count everyone taking for instance one short course in the institution as alumni, but being too restrictive is also a problem from the international point-of-view. With the large variety of exchange programmes and free choice to move to another institution to complete the master programme, a too strict definition of alumni might unnecessarily rule out very prominent population of international alumni in exchange for strategic image. (Dobson *et al.* 2015, 10-11) Furthermore, there are a number of extremely successful individuals in the business life who have not finished their studies. Such people often support the idea of mentoring, which is one of the key services that alumni organisation can provide, and might very well be interested to share their experiences and knowledge. Should these persons be excluded from alumni activities, because they have not gained the degree?

According to the survey results, there clearly is interest in the alumni activities, but not enough information available, which is very similar to the conclusion that the workshop to establish the Vietnamese chapter for HHA came to (see chapter 2.1). If the graduation form is the first time a graduate hears of HHA, it seems rather late from the engagement perspective – especially if the only information available is a tick box option. 30 respondents also specified that they saw HHA as a link between student life and business life (which incidentally is also worthwhile connection from the university’s perspective (Arboleda 2015, 38-39)); and it is not easy to achieve that if one end of the link is missing. Engaging alumni is very difficult, so why waste the three first years of nurturing the budding alumni relationship?

Many universities have already realised that the key to a functional alumni engagement is building a good student experience. Factors contributing to a great student experience might be something that seemingly is not directly related to alumni activities, such as offering sport possibilities, but the main idea is that the students collect meaningful and positive experiences so that they later have pleasant affiliations to the alma mater, which in time turns into affinity towards the university and other alumni. It is also important to understand that building this relationship begins already before student even is a student: the power of first impressions – in admissions process or in becoming a student – should not be underestimated. In order to enforce the connection between international students and alumni, the coming and leaving students and alumni should be connected with events to start the process for the newcomers to become future engaged alumni. (Arboleda 2015, 38-43)

Even though this is not an item on the HHA strategy for 2016, starting with student engagement would lay a solid ground for later alumni engagement, and positively serve strengthening alumni’s professional growth and lowering the threshold for mentoring – from both perspectives. This study recommends that Haaga-Helia carefully evaluate the definition of alumni and consider how the current students could be involved in a way that builds the foundation for strengthening the alumni community. As this topic is outside of the scope of this study, only some recommendations are provided (see below). Having said that, HHA is taking the first step to this direction with their action plan (Haaga-Helia Alumni 2015): “*The alumni and recruitment services are made more visible by being present in the campuses in co-operation with career counselling and other partners*”.

The survey did not unequivocally prove that there is lack of emotional attachment to Haaga-Helia among the alumni, but it was reported by some of the respondents and it might be one of the reasons for the low response rate. It could for instance mean that the alumni

and students don't feel particular pride for belonging to the Haaga-Helia community. While this issue can be addressed with the social media strategy, it won't solve the problem, which is why HHA cannot take the full responsibility for this task. It will have to be done in co-operation with other Haaga-Helia units.

Based on the above, the strategic tasks are divided into two parts

1. Enabling initial engagement (outside the scope of this study)
2. Facilitating initiated engagement through social media

As the first part is outside the scope of this study, only recommendations are provided.

### **5.6.2 Enabling initial engagement (outside the scope)**

This study recommends that the following activities be considered.

1. All Haaga-Helia units should contribute to creating such student experience and Haaga-Helia spirit from the very beginning of the studies that the students grow a natural emotional attachment, which continues later in the form of alumni engagement.
2. Haaga-Helia should consider how students could be involved in a way that building the Haaga-Helia alumni identity starts from the very beginning of the studies. During the last study year, which currently is considered as the target period for alumni recruitment, many students are only working on their thesis having finished all courses. This means that they are already mentally and physically detaching themselves from the university. There are a number of ways to implement the student involvement. As described above, students could be granted a full membership in the alumni network. Alternatively, they could be allowed to access some of the services as external members. However, in this case it is important to find such an approach that does not create unnecessary rift between the alumni and the students but that they effectively feel belonging to the same community. One practical way to implement this could be to specify communication policies so that for instance graduated alumni would receive the e-Signals and be granted a membership in the LinkedIn group, whereas students would be involved with the help of open Facebook page and webpages.
3. Improve the visibility of the alumni network within the new students. The management should enforce the mandate of HHA so that all of the Haaga-Helia staff understand the importance of the alumni network in a way that supports marketing

the network from the beginning of the studies onwards. Each program has several workshops, where either the Alumni Coordinator or alumni volunteers could join to introduce HHA to new students. In addition to presenting the benefits of joining, they could pass on a registration form at the spot, give instructions on how to do it online and emphasize the importance of giving some other than Haaga-Helia email address.

4. The data quality in the alumni registry should be improved so that the registry gives fairly accurate status of the alumni, since currently it is not possible to unequivocally and easily even extract the percentages of international alumni. At least the data entries should all be in the same format in one system so that managing and extracting the information is straightforward and doesn't require a huge amount of effort. It might be worth considering whether it were possible to implement a system whereby the alumni themselves could update the contact information directly in the system. Further in the future the same system could be used to provide exclusive content (such as webinars and videos) to the alumni.
5. Start building the international alumni network with events at the beginning of every academic year. This can be done in co-operation with the international affairs. These events could be focused on one country at a time so that the new students get to meet older students from their own country, who will shortly become alumni. Even better if there are actually alumni, in case it is possible to find those who still live in Finland or who can travel back for the event. The scope of the meeting should be networking; perhaps invite a visitor from a partner company to introduce career opportunities. Also the students would most likely love to hear about the life of the alumni.
6. The alumni network should be allocated with a reasonable investment in the Haaga-Helia budget. One of the causes that the alumni network and the conjoined career and recruitment services endorse is that the work by competent professionals educated at Haaga-Helia's must be valued, and this should start from the beginning, i.e. when they are still students. Therefore it would not make sense to ask the alumni to volunteer for alumni activities without any compensation. Considering for instance a lecture as a form of donation might be something that is reasonable to expect in the future, but not likely before the general attitude towards donating is changed to a positive one.

Addressing some of the issues could be transformed into a competition. For instance, everyone who updates their contact information, would be eligible to partake a lottery for prizes. Similarly, the ones who invite the largest number of new alumni to the social media group, would win a prize and so on. The prize could be something material, like Haaga-Helia products, but since the alumni highly value networking, the prize could be a (online or offline) chat session with a representative of a partner company, career counselling or some other dedicated training session. To attract the international alumni, the partner companies could be asked to arrange this session with an employee from another country than Finland.

### **5.6.3 Maintain initiated engagement with social media**

Firstly, the hashtag #HHAAlumniNet should be implemented in all social media communication to build the awareness and identity of HHA. It is not as concise as one could hope, but the most logical hashtag (#HHAAlumni) is already being used by e.g. Heritage Hall Alumni @HHAAlumni and Homeless Hounds @Homeless\_Hounds.).

As the social media is very visual world, Haaga-Helia should create several infographics regarding its purpose, activities and performance and share these through different social media platforms. The first infographics could be a general one describing what HHA does, how many members it has and which countries the members are from as well as instructions to register as a member and get more information.

According to the survey, the most popular social media sites are LinkedIn and Facebook. However, since not everyone is willing to start using another platform, HHA should have a place where (already now) information could be published without any limitations. The website HHA has under the Haaga-Helia internet pages would serve this purpose well. However, these pages currently are lacking many functionalities, which would be beneficial, such as a blog page and a Twitter feed with hashtag #HHAAlumniNet. In addition, the email newsletter should be continued, as the respondents saw that as the best communication method.

The strategic procedures recommended for HHA to maintain the engagement through social media are presented in table 4, which is further developed from the honeycomb model for social media table from chapter 5.3.3. Based on the survey result and the statistics of worldwide use of social media platforms, it seems that there is a missed opportunity – particularly concerning the international students – in not having an alumni group in Facebook, as so many of the respondents stated preferring Facebook also for professional



purposes. Therefore it is highly recommended that Haaga-Helia re-evaluate this policy and consider the option of having at least an unofficial site for alumni purposes. In fact this question could be combined with the issue of involving the students. There are examples of alumni organisation allowing the students to join the alumni groups (e.g. Lavrusik 2009), but the group policy could state that the official Haaga-Helia Alumni network is maintained in LinkedIn, to which group only Haaga-Helia graduates (and possibly others with a special permit) are allowed, and that HHA also maintains an unofficial, open group for all students and all alumni in Facebook. A good example of a well-functioning alumni Facebook page is the one of Alumni Association of the University of Michigan (LikeAlyzer 2015), which has the highest score of all the alumni pages analysed by LikeAlyzer online tool.

**Table 4. Strategic procedures for all communication channels**

Platform	LinkedIn	Facebook	e-Signals	Web pages
Update frequency	Weekly	As needed		
Facilitate network of HH alumni	Always	-	-	-
Invite recruiters@Partners to join the group	As needed	-	-	-
Publish open jobs ads from Partners	As needed	Yes	Only info	-
Facilitate Alumni virtual networking	(or some other)	Only info	Only info	-
Celebrate achievements	As needed	As needed	Monthly	As needed
Celebrate successful alumni	As needed	As needed	Monthly	As needed
Publish statistics	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly
Blogpost: a day in the life of...	Only info	Only info	Only info	2 / term
Inform about current happenings	As needed	As needed	Monthly	-
Hype for events and seminars	As needed	(If open to all)	(Monthly)	Only info
Recorded lectures by guest speakers	Only info	Only info	(Monthly)	(or HH YouTube channel)
Publish other videos	Only info	Only info	Only info	(or HH YouTube channel)

The most popular benefit expectation was '*networking and professional benefits*', which is also represented in the HHA policies ('*Alumni and recruitment services facilitate professional growth of the alumni. The aim is to improve the co-operation with business partners*

by embarking upon collaboration projects'), therefore it should be considered in the social media plan. This aspect was considered in the honeycomb analysis for HHA (see chapter 5.3.3), by recommending the following activities: facilitation of the alumni network in LinkedIn, inviting recruiters from partner companies to the group to scout potential talents, publish (by HHA or the partner companies themselves) job opportunities and facilitating virtual networking events consisting of webcasts, online chats events and group discussions.

To address the second most popular benefit expectation '*learning about career paths and career opportunities*' as well as to allow members of the network to build their professional identity (and additionally or alternatively reach other personal or professional goals such as employee hunting) a new blog series could be initiated. This activity could also serve to increase the publicity of the international alumni, if they were willing to write these posts.

However, since there were respondents, who did not have any social media account (8 %) and since the majority of the respondents still preferred email as the main communication channel (see chapter 5.3.1), HHA should continue to send the email newsletter. It should still serve as an information source regarding current happenings in general, but it can support the goals of the social media plan, where relevant. For instance job opportunities can be published in the e-Signals if there is adequately time until the application period closes. At the same time e-Signals could promote the LinkedIn page as the main channel for these purposes.

In order to encourage the members to be active in social media, HHA could award the most industrious or influential *some* contributors in the Alumni Gala event. Unfortunately it seems that these data are no longer available (at least for free) in LinkedIn, so the analysis would require some manual work by the Alumni Coordinator.

The big problem currently is that the LinkedIn group only contains around 2 000 members, whereas search in LinkedIn with keyword 'haaga-helia' and search option "school: Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences", brings up almost 17 000 people. It is not likely that the Alumni Coordinator has the needed time to start contacting all of them personally – especially if the alumni status needs to be verified with the graduation lists – but it at least gives indication that there is a big potential in LinkedIn that has not been reached yet. Haaga-Helia could consider if this could be a suitable job for a summer trainee.

However, none of this will be of any use unless the performance is measured. Therefore monthly monitoring should be started to collect measurements of the social media effectiveness. Recommended key performance indexes are

- Number of new members in alumni registry
- Number of lost members in alumni registry
- Number of members in LinkedIn group (no group statistics available)
- Usage of #HHAAlumniNet (using some online tools, such as Keyhole (<http://keyhole.co>))
- Facebook statistics (if Facebook page implemented) from Facebook Insights
  - o Number of followers in Facebook group
  - o Overview: Page likes
  - o Overview: Post reach
  - o Overview: Engagement
  - o People: Engaged
- YouTube statistics (if the videos are published via Haaga-Helia YouTube channel)
  - o Number of views in videos

A preliminary proposal has been created for the following year after the pilot (in figure 22). Since HHA does not have its own Facebook page, no activities have been planned for that platform. The respondents reported checking their social media mostly on a weekly or even daily basis, so content must be published at least on a weekly basis. The following weekly plan could be followed in the monthly alumni communication:

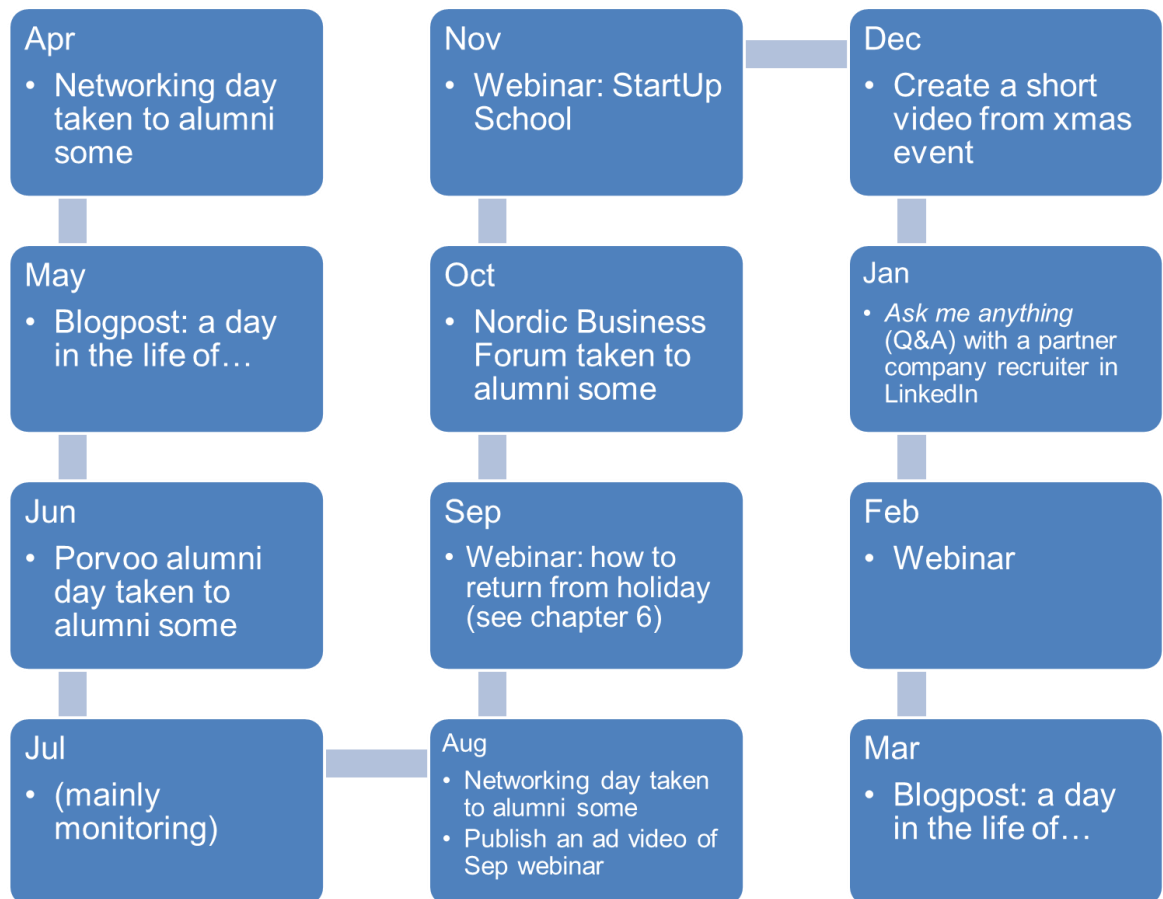
Week 1: Monthly alumni statistics or story of a successful alumni

Week 2: See figure 22

Week 3: e-Signals

Week 4: (reserved for the administrative work)

The monthly activities proposed for the upcoming months until March 2017 are presented in figure 22. The simplest action to implement is to improve social media presence in events that are already being arranged (such as the Porvoo alumni day in June). An enthusiastic alumna or alumnus could be recruited to be a social media ambassador for the alumni network, whose task would be to post relevant topics during the event for instance to Instagram or Facebook. Also after the event some pictures could be published with a short summary of the event either in the Alumni Network web pages or in the LinkedIn group.



**Figure 22. Proposed schedule of activities until March 2017**

Considering, that Twitter and Instagram were named only by a few respondents, and that the resources available at Haaga-Helia to co-ordinate alumni activities are restricted, there is no sense in implementing separate Twitter or Instagram user profiles for HHA at this point. However, Haaga-Helia should utilise the formal Haaga-Helia profiles to also share information about the alumni activities by always using the HHA hashtag.

HHA has a goal for year 2016 to set up a donations fund, but based on the study results, the recommendation is that active fundraising is not started until alumni engagement has been improved. According to the literature (see chapter 3.2.4) the alumni first need to understand that the collecting donations is not the only underlying driver for all alumni activities. Starting the fundraising without having established a reciprocal co-operative relationship between the alumni and the association, might even work against the goal and do more harm than good.

## **6 Implementation: a project plan for a webinar**

To test the implementation plan items presented in the previous chapter, the plan was to arrange a web seminar to a group of pilot alumni. This event was to be evaluated by the attendees and reported in this plan. Due to issues in the practical arrangements, the streaming of the planned event did not take place, but the plan structure is presented in this report in order to show how such an event could be organised.

This chapter consists of a project plan for a webinar implementation. An event planned for September 2016 (webinar related to wellbeing in working life) has been used as an example. Additionally the feedback collected from the presentation of this plan is reported.

### **6.1 Project plan**

This chapter describes the project plan for a webinar event.

#### **6.1.1 Objective**

A live-streamed event contributes to the engagement of Haaga-Helia alumni by offering a platform to alumni from several locations and alumni in challenging circumstances (with children or inadequate transportation possibilities) to

- improve their professional competence
- learn about current and upcoming trends
- share experiences for instance regarding different professions and positions, being an entrepreneur, working abroad etc.

#### **6.1.2 Scope and deliverables**

The scope of the implementation project is to organise a seminar or a lecture that will be filmed and streamed over the internet. The seminar will be of a relevant topic and the audience will be Haaga-Helia alumni.

There are two possible ways to implement such an event in practice. The plan below is assuming that the event is a bigger one and that there possibly is live audience sitting in the same room as the speaker. However, live broadcast can also be done using Adobe Connect software, which is more suitable for recording with a small webcam and in which the main focus is on the presentable slides.

The arrangements for this event can be split into the following work deliverables. The tasks to be done in advance are presented in table 5. The event coordinator is responsible for these tasks. It would be a good practice to ask the participants to sign up for the event. This can be done using the normal enrolment tools. Having some understanding of potential attendees will help to ensure that the technical requirements are fulfilled and that the event is worth organising.

**Table 5. Work package 1: Tasks to be performed before the event**

No	Deliverable	Approval criteria
1	Decide the date	Date has been added to the monthly action calendar of alumni network.
2	Book the room or auditorium	The room has been booked using the official Haaga-Helia processes.
3	Book AV-resources	The person to take care of the technical implementation has been reserved for the event according to the Haaga-Helia processes.
4	Invite the speaker and agree the compensation	The speaker has confirmed that they are coming to the event.
5	Invite the audience	The event has been advertised at least in e-Signals, LinkedIn and Haaga-Helia Facebook page
6	Create a Facebook page	An unofficial Facebook page has been created for the event to facilitate discussion before, during and after the event.
7	Ask the presenter to create a short video ad	Video is filmed and published (e.g. on the Haaga-Helia YouTube channel)

Work package 2 consists of tasks that are to be performed during the live event. The monitoring of the social media during the event can be done by the Alumni Coordinator or if there are additional resources, another person can be assigned to do it in order to allow the Alumni Coordinator to focus on making sure that the event flows smoothly. The assigned Technical Specialist will handle the technical implementation of the event.

**Table 6. Work package 2: Tasks to be performed during the event**

<b>No</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Approval criteria</b>
8	Set up the discussion wall	Discussion wall is available for the online viewers for commenting.
9	Film the event and broadcast it live over the internet	The event has been visible for the alumni on the internet.
10	Monitor the discussion wall in the meeting and raise comments and questions	Questions at the discussion wall have been addressed
11	Monitor the Facebook page and raise comments and questions	Questions on the Facebook page have been addressed

The final work package consists of post-implementation tasks, that aim to ensure that the event also serves as a lesson for the future events and that the people involved will be willing to partake the next event as well. The Alumni Coordinator is responsible for these tasks.

**Table 7. Work package 3: Tasks to be performed after the event**

<b>No</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Approval criteria</b>
12	Issue the feedback survey (see an example in appendix 6)	At least 10 feedback responses have been received
13	Send appropriate tokens of gratitude and issue agreed compensations	Compensation and possible gifts have been received
14	Facilitate discussion in Facebook if it continues after the event	Questions and comments are reacted to during 1 week after the event
15	Close the Facebook page if relevant	(Confirm if the same page will be used for the following events as well)
16	Go through the feedback, include a summary to e-Signals	Survey is closed, results are reviewed and summarised, notes for improvement are written down for the next event and a summary has been distributed to alumni

### 6.1.3 Schedule

Since the project is rather simple, it does not make sense to apply heavy project management processes and practices. Therefore only three milestones have been defined.

These milestones are presented in table 8. A more detailed schedule with preparation work breakdown structure specified is presented in appendix 7.

**Table 8. Milestones for event implementation**

Milestone	Date	Description
MS1	2016-05-02	Decision to arrange the meeting, approval for the budget and agreeing the date
MS2	2016-09-02	Decision to confirm that the event will be arranged as planned. To be checked that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- speaker is still available and reserved</li> <li>- there are enough enrolled participants</li> <li>- other resources are still available</li> </ul>
MS3	2016-10-03	Decision to close the activities; review of the feedback and approval of the project

#### 6.1.4 Cost

The estimated costs are given in table 9. Naturally the speaker fees vary greatly and most likely that fee is one of the key factors when deciding whom to invite as a guest speaker. If the Alumni Coordinator coordinates this project, these hours most likely will not be recorded separately. However, if this event was not arranged, the Alumni Coordinator could use this time doing something else.

**Table 9. Estimated cost for an online seminar implementation**

	Hours	Costs
Event (Alumni) Coordinator	100	7 000 €
AV Technical Specialist	16	1 120 €
Speaker fee		1 000 €
Gifts		50 €
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>9 170 €</b>

#### 6.1.5 Risks

Most of the risks in this sort of project are related to the availability of the resources. If either the room, the speaker or the audience become unavailable, it has a major impact



on the implementation of the event. The biggest uncertainty is related to the audience as the past experiences have shown that the alumni are quick to enrol but do not necessarily attend after all. Therefore it is a good practice to internally agree a certain minimum number of participants, keeping in mind, though, that the first events most likely will not attract a huge audience. The initial risk analysis is presented in table 10, but it should be re-evaluated at the beginning and during any implementation.

**Table 10. Initial risk analysis**

<b>Risk factor</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Probability</b>
Room not available	The room is booked on that date, there is a mix-up with room booking or an event with a higher priority trumps the seminar	Book all rooms well in advance for the whole year  Keep other staff aware of the event and the date	High	Low
Speaker not available	The speaker falls ill or is not able to appear due to another reason	Keep in touch with the speaker to ensure commitment  Agree a back-up speaker from Haaga-Helia staff	High	Low
Audience not available	The alumni are not interested in the event or the timing is bad	Advertise fiercely Monitor the number of enrolled alumni Agree go/no go date (consider cancellation terms with the speaker)	High	Low

## **6.2 Presentation of the project plan and feedback**

Since the implementation of the virtual event was not successful, the project plan for such an event, along with the study and its results, were presented to a group of Haaga-Helia staff working with alumni activities. In addition to the Alumni Coordinator, the invitation was sent to the Sales Manager of Haaga-Helia's Hospitality Insiders Club (an organisation offering networking and further education for professionals in hospitality field), a Senior Lecturer who runs a network of Russian students at Haaga-Helia, Project Coordinator of Haaga-Helia's Hospitality Competence Center in Estonia, thesis tutor and thesis examiner, of whom the first two attended the presentation meeting. The aim was to share information of the study as well as in a very small scale pilot a virtual presentation.

Due to technical restrictions the presentation was given in a Lync/Skype for Business meeting instead of the AdobeConnect, which would have better suited for an online lecture. The shortcomings of Lync for this purpose were clearly noticed during the session. Since the participants can have very wide range of technical audio configurations, the sound quality might not be very good, or the audio might suffer from feedback making it very difficult speak when there is a slightly delayed echo on the line. Furthermore, Lync offers a very easy way for all the participants to record the meeting, which might bring very unfortunate challenges with unauthorised distribution of the recorded material. These functionalities would at least require that there is a separate online moderator ready to mute any unwanted voice from the line. As there were only two participants (in addition to the presenter) in the meeting, the chat window was not used for discussion.

A few points were discussed after the presentation. The Project Coordinator of the Hospitality Insiders Club liked the approach that Haaga-Helia should offer the alumni something they actually want instead of trying to just push out Haaga-Helia's own agenda. This has been noticed for instance in the increasing number of Club's LinkedIn group members. Whenever interesting content is posted to the group, there always are LinkedIn users, who request membership in the group.

The issue of timing was concluded to be a problematic topic, as mentioned earlier in this report. The participants agreed that it is too late to start grabbing the alumni during the last year. However, the past attempts to work in co-operation with the head lecturers of the degree programs have not been successful, since they have been reluctant to accept any more information sharing to the students. The same approach was recommended for this challenge as for attracting alumni: making the lecturers understand how they could benefit from the alumni network. According to the Alumni Coordinator this perspective has been offered, but without success. Furthermore based on the study it would seem that the international students have even stronger interest towards Haaga-Helia than the Finnish alumni. This truly emphasizes the importance of engaging the international future alumni when they still are students in Finland in order to build a sustainable alumni relationship with them. The Project Coordinator of the Hospitality Insiders Club agreed that it's not the best use of resources to try to regain the interest of the 'lost' alumni. Overall making all of Haaga-Helia understand the importance of well-functioning alumni network will require quite a lot of internal marketing.

Regarding Facebook, the participants agreed that there should be a Facebook page that is separate from the official Haaga-Helia page. The Haaga-Helia Facebook page is very

much focused on the institution but the alumni page could focus on people and individuals. This approach would provide more personal outlet to reach the current and future alumni. Similarly the idea of using Haaga-Helia hashtag and recruiting social media ambassadors was supported.

Lastly, the participants discussed the problem of insufficient resources and the respective challenges in prioritisation. In the case of scarce resources, prioritisation is extremely important. An organisation should identify its main goal or goals and then prioritise all tasks so that they serve achieving those goals. For HHA such prioritisation has been done, but still the network suffers from too few hands. Overall the plan was considered to be on a fairly detailed and practical level and so, in addition to relating the topics above, the participants felt that the results of the thesis will be beneficial for HHA.

## 7 Conclusions

This chapter summarises how the study was conducted, what results were received through the data collection and what recommendations were given based on these results. Furthermore the study is evaluated from credibility perspective and possible limitations are noted. Finally the learned lessons are discussed and further study topics recommended.

### 7.1 Short summary of the study and evaluation of the results

The Haaga-Helia Alumni network is a body within the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences aiming to improve and maintain the relationship between Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and its alumni. A well-functioning and reciprocal relationship is needed to ensure that Haaga-Helia can continue to support the professional growth of its alumni in return for guest lecturers, company partnerships and donations.

Currently the alumni network struggles in reaching the alumni – both initially upon their graduation but also further along the line. Joining the network is very manual process that is often overlooked, partly due to the fact that the students simply don't know what the alumni network is. Even when the person is registered as a member that might be the only thing the person ever does as a Haaga-Helia alumna or alumnus. This is clearly seen from the interest the monthly newsletter creates (only around 30 % of the alumni who even have subscribed to the newsletter actually read it). The issue is even more problematic with the international alumni, who don't have the opportunity to join any local events organised in Helsinki. Haaga-Helia is extremely interested in revitalising the connection with the international alumni, since it has set goals to export educational services and the local alumni in these countries would offer added value by bringing the individual students perspectives and experiences.

The goal of this study was to clarify the purpose of Haaga-Helia and using that purpose as the basis, evaluate and recommend ways to increase the engagement of the international alumni especially utilising the virtual community tools of social media. The basic data collection was done in the form of a survey that was issued to all Haaga-Helia students and alumni in December 2015, which gained total of 557 replies.

Based on the survey results, the email newsletter was still seen as the number one communication method, but additionally both LinkedIn and Facebook were popular. A quarter of the respondents did not see any purpose for the network, but the most popular ex-

pected benefits were networking and professional benefits. In terms of professional online networking, the respondents reported being mostly passive, but most of them still would check these platforms for professional purposes weekly or even daily. In addition to the survey results, the Haaga-Helia strategy and HHA action plan were analysed to ensure that the proposed activities are in line with these goals and thus constitute as strategy implementation.

As a result two set of recommendations were given. General improvement proposals address the possibilities to engage the future alumni while they still are near Haaga-Helia, as in being students. The second set of recommendations consists of a monthly plan for the coming 12 months that includes for instance 2 webinars, networking with recruiting professionals and vigorous reporting of alumni events in the alumni social media platforms.

What was clearly visible from the demography of the respondents was that the vast majority of the students who responded actually were from other countries. The percentage dropped significantly for the alumni responses. This would indicate that focusing the resources on the current international students, and fostering them to becoming Haaga-Helia alumni might be much more fruitful than attempting to reach the possibly already lost international alumni. Furthermore, it might be relevant for Haaga-Helia to specify the internationalisation goals: Which countries should be targeted first? In which countries does Haaga-Helia actually have the largest alumni base (after the alumni registry gives a more accurate picture of the situation)? What is the reasonable amount of effort that should be allocated for engaging the alumni in those countries considering the possible benefits in return?

The recommendations in general did not turn out to be anything out of the ordinary. A restriction naturally was that no new technical solution could be created or implemented within the frames of this study. Furthermore, since the resources available for the network are limited, there is only so much that actually can be done. This of course is related to the question of balance between an innovative and practical, or easily implementable, study.

Compared to the objectives, the study was able to clarify the purpose of HHA. If the recommendations can be implemented, there is a high probability that these actions will contribute at least to the network's ways to get connected to and to keep touch with the international graduates.

Since starting this study the alumni network has already taken some promising initiatives. Discussions regarding renewing the alumni registry have been started. A collaboration with a group of ICT program students is aiming to create a concept for 'Alumni Tinder', which would help the alumni to find other alumni with similar interests. The Alumni Coordinator has also initiated discussions concerning building an alumni dedicated intranet pages.

Furthermore, the alumni network has started to educate HH alumni to evaluate students' knowledge and skills for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). At the end of this course the alumni will receive a certification from Haaga-Helia as a compensation for their efforts in RPL. This certificate can then be used also elsewhere to indicate one's capabilities in knowledge evaluation.

However, while the Alumni Coordinator is fully committed to improve the alumni operations and finds this study useful, there is no definitive evidence that Haaga-Helia in general is able to allocated needed resources to change the mind-set within the university and to allow the alumni network to carry out the plan or activities created in this study.

## **7.2 Reliability, validity and limitations**

Even though one of the main goals for this study was to identify how the international alumni could be engaged, the survey results do not give very comprehensive picture of the perspective of alumni that have left Finland after their graduation. Due to the low number of responses from this specific target group of international alumni, the study does not provide reliable conclusions regarding the similarities or differences in behaviour or expectations between alumni from different cultures or countries.

Having said that, the survey did address the problem in a larger sense considering that even the alumni living in Finland have shown signs of disinterest by for instance not showing up for the local events. Furthermore, the improvement of the virtual alumni community with the Finnish alumni would effectively improve the attractiveness of alumni network in the eyes of the international students. This is why the results can still be considered valid.

In addition to the low response rate, the survey itself had some limitations. For instance, some other relevant questions could have been asked, such as specifically which type of content would the respondents expect and appreciate in the alumni social media. Also the question regarding the benefit expectations was a little too vague: "professional benefits" can be a very wide variety of perks.

Lastly, social media as a phenomenon (in addition to the rapid technical advancements) is constantly changing as trends emerge and disappear. Excluding the vast amount of data the social media itself is creating, there are numerous and again numerous articles, blogs, studies and research results. It is challenging to find the most relevant literature basis for the particular situation at hand, and between the time a study is started and the time it is finished, some big changes might already have happened either in the technical solutions or in the behaviour of people. Therefore there is always a risk that texts from even five years earlier are not relevant anymore.

### **7.3 Lessons learned**

Due to the vast amount of blog and news articles, there always is a doubt that something is missed. One good way to keep up with the latest news is to create a Google alert for suitable keywords. The list of recent posts appear as requested in the email, and it is very easy to choose the articles that actually are valid concerning the thesis theme. This should be done at the very beginning of the thesis process in order to get the most benefits.

The survey had a few issues regarding the wording of the questions as well as the actual content. For instance, the word 'local' was used to refer to any location; such as a gathering in Vietnam would be a local event. However, since the locality in alumni network is extremely tightly associated with the location of the university, there were some misunderstandings and therefore the results for this question might not be reliable.

The response rate in the study remained on a low level and despite it being relatively high compared to other alumni surveys, more respondents might have been reached if the response time were a bit longer, if the survey were issued towards the middle of an academic period and if there were more aggressive marketing to gain visibility.

Finally, the survey did not offer any option for the respondents to give feedback about the survey. Perhaps some questions were not ambiguous or relevant and having a free text field at the end of the survey would have enabled better evaluation of reliability of the survey.

### **7.4 Recommendations for further research**

Based on the e-Signals statistics tool for instance 91 recipients from Ireland and 47 from United Kingdom had opened the invitation email but not clicked the link to the survey. This

indicates that there is some level of interest in these international groups since they still read the emails. However, currently the content is not attracting enough to take the next step to get involved. Once HHA has developed the content further and possibly grown its social media networks, these international groups and their expectations could be evaluated in a focused study directed solely to one country at a time. Good candidates for the first studies would be the aforementioned Ireland and United Kingdom as well as Estonia and Russia, which were among the biggest country groups in the survey results.

Since students graduating from the bachelor's degree programs are required to spend minimum of three years working before being eligible to apply for an admission to a master's degree program, it is likely that they will move to another location either in Finland or in other countries during this 3-year period. This might also affect their decision regarding the university they select for their master's degree. It might be interesting to study how students, who change to another university, either retain or discard the double affinity. And if they only stay emotionally attached to one university, is it the first or second university? Finding out these underlying reasons might explain to develop the whole university to become more engaging.

If Haaga-Helia decides to implement a Facebook page for HHA, this development activity could be done as a thesis. While the creation of the page itself is relatively straightforward, discussions need to be conducted with the Haaga-Helia communications department to ensure that the new page complies with their requirements, the illustrations need to be planned and created and responsibilities for updating the page and monitoring the content need to be clarified.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Active users in social media platforms

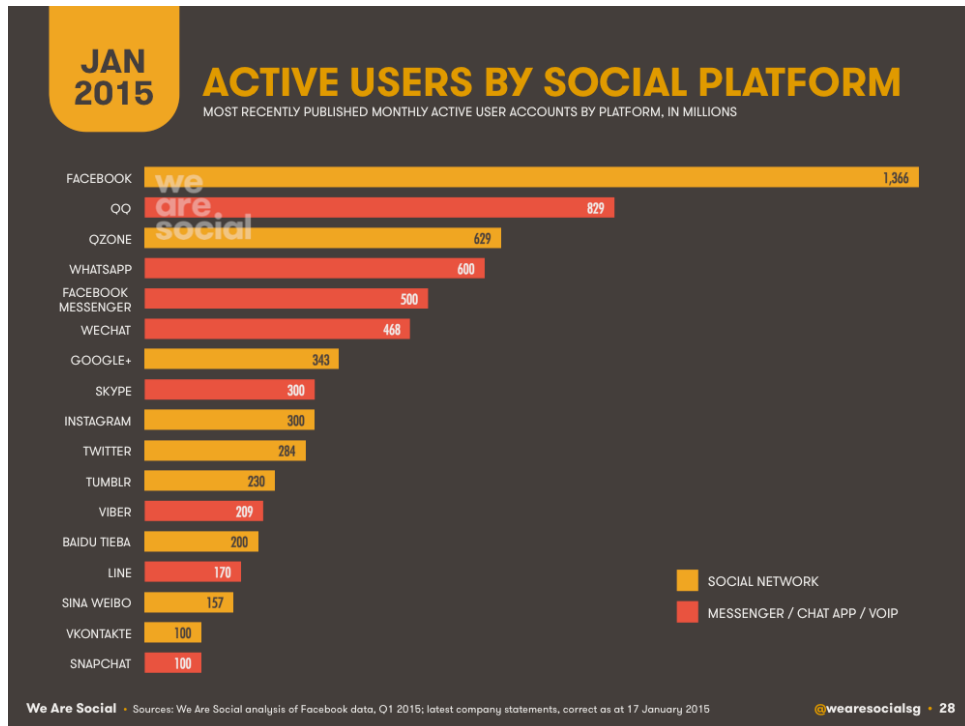


Figure 23. Active users by social media platform (Kemp 2015)

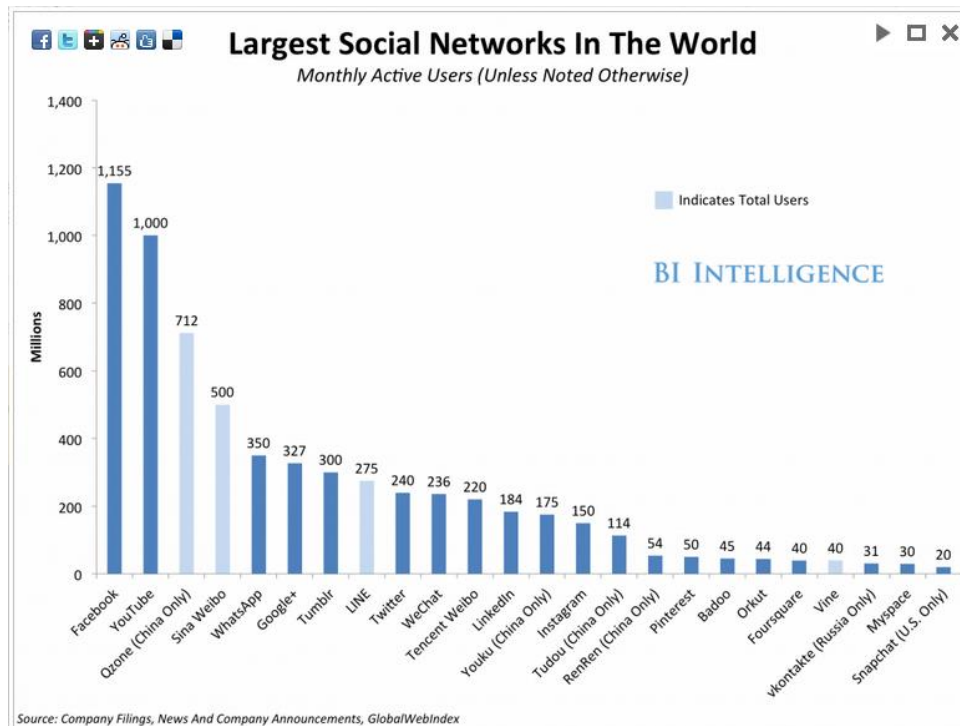


Figure 24. Largest social networks in the world (Gareth 2014)

## Appendix 2. Country-wise statistics of the biggest some platforms

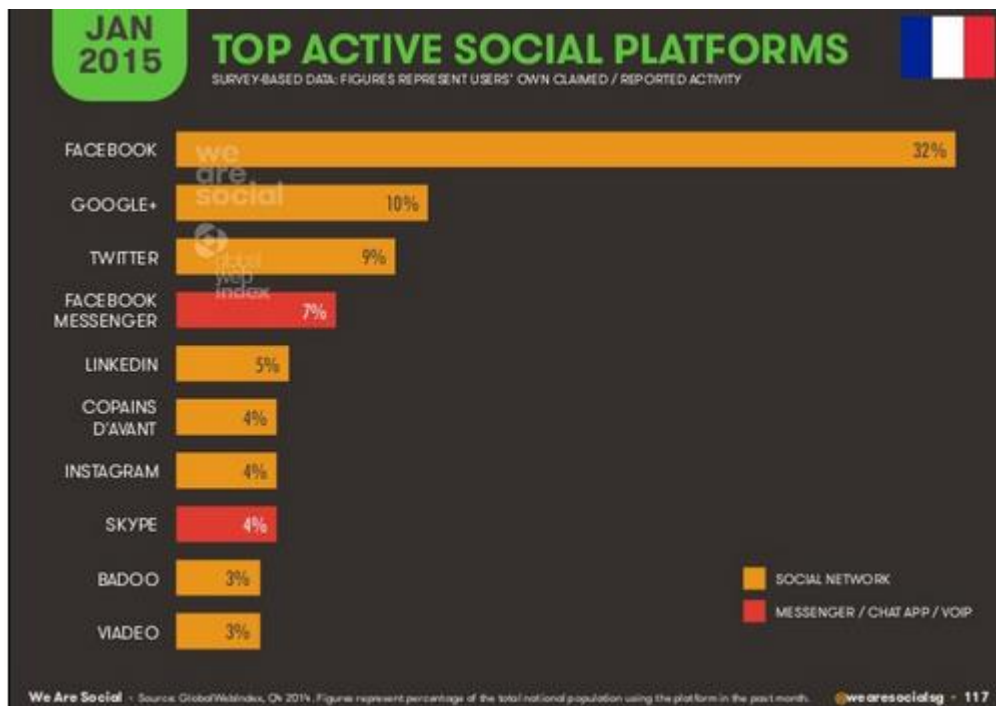


Figure 25. Top active social platforms: France (Kemp 2015)

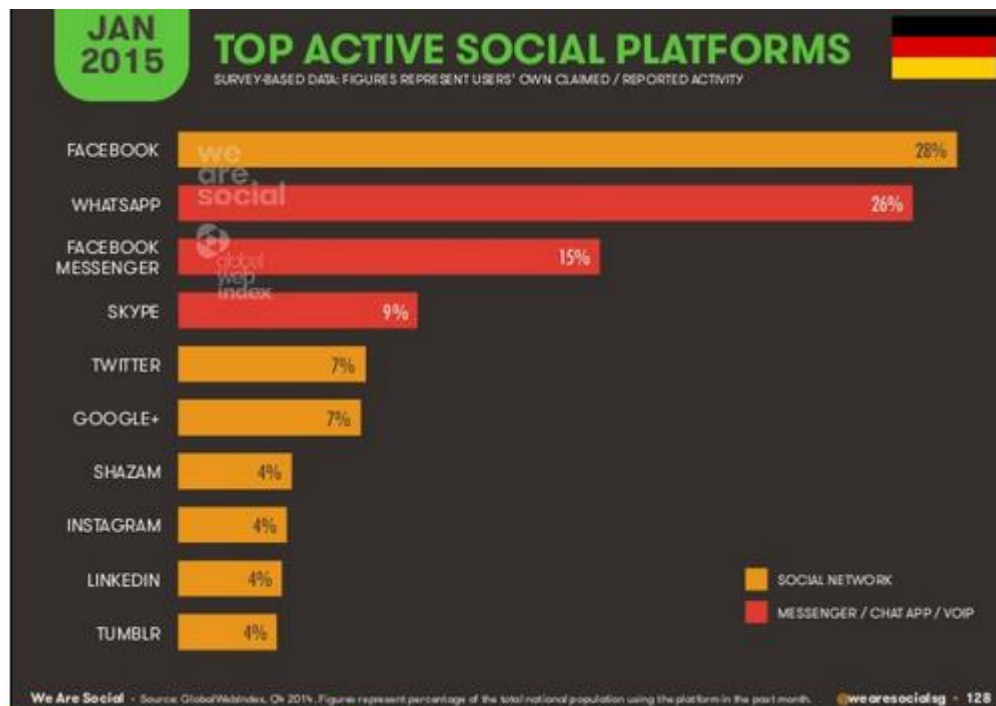


Figure 26. Top active social platforms: Germany (Kemp 2015)

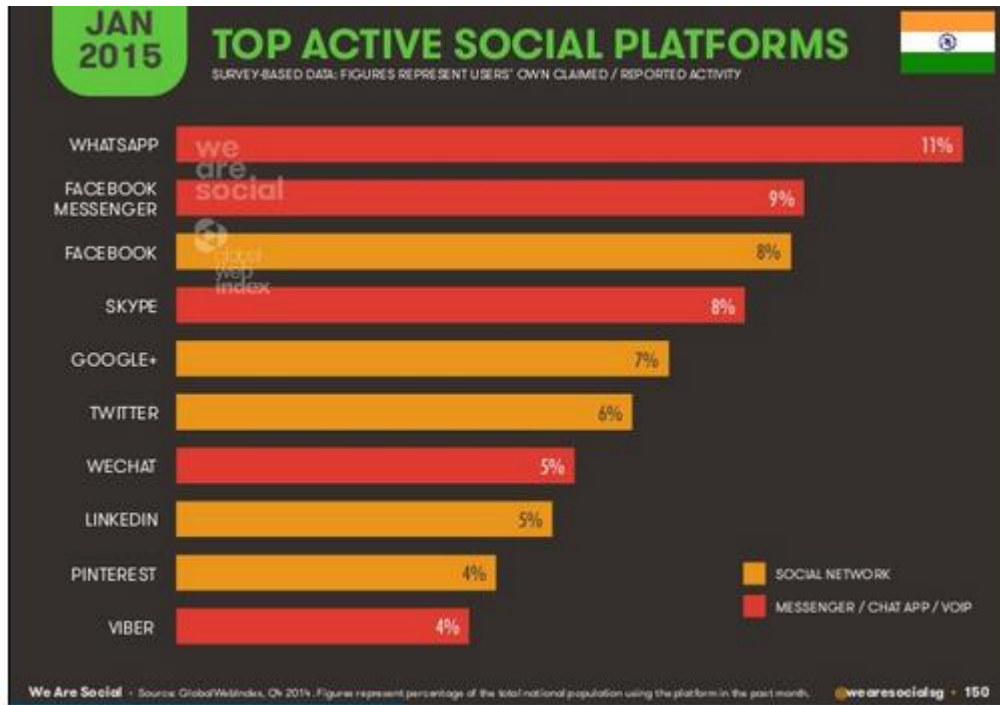


Figure 27. Top active social platforms: India (Kemp 2015)

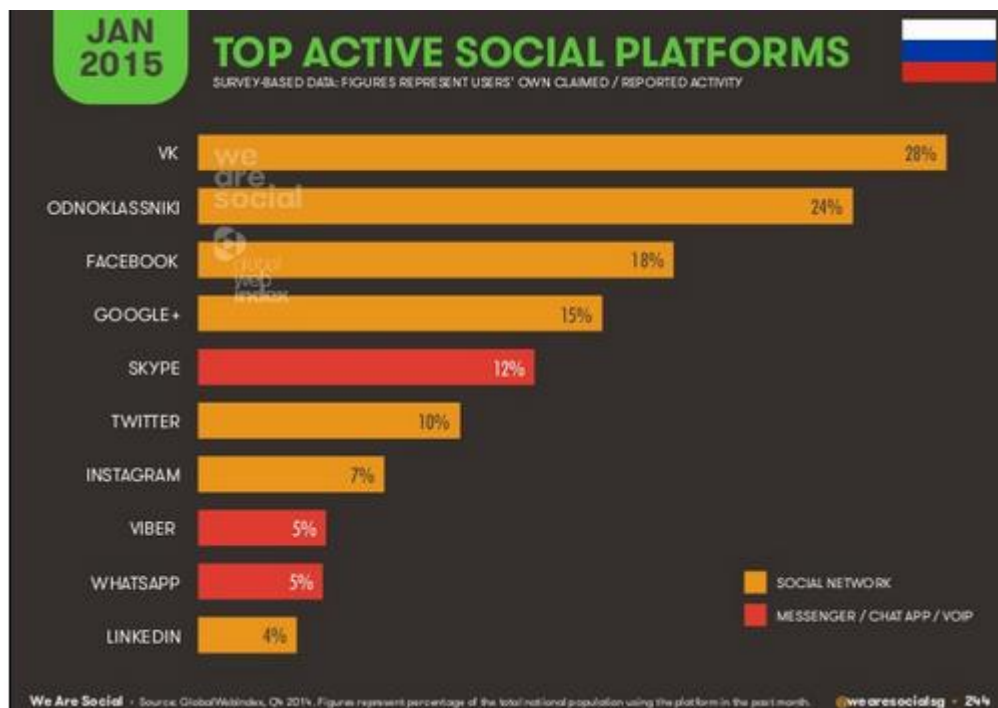


Figure 28. Top active social platforms: Russia (Kemp 2015)

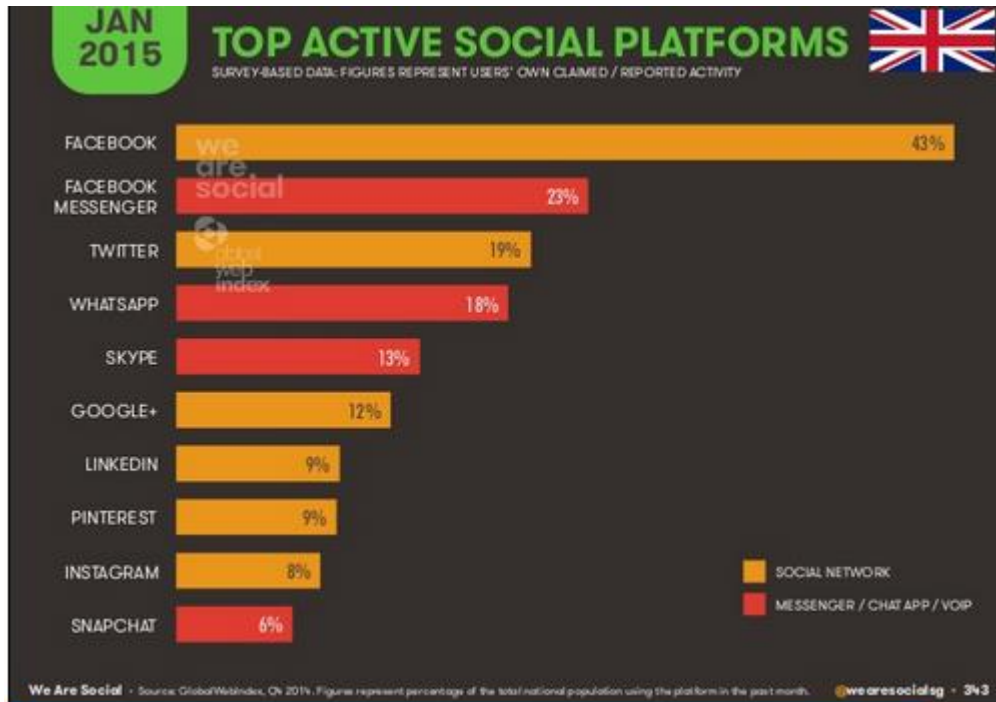


Figure 29. Top active social platforms: United Kingdom (Kemp 2015)

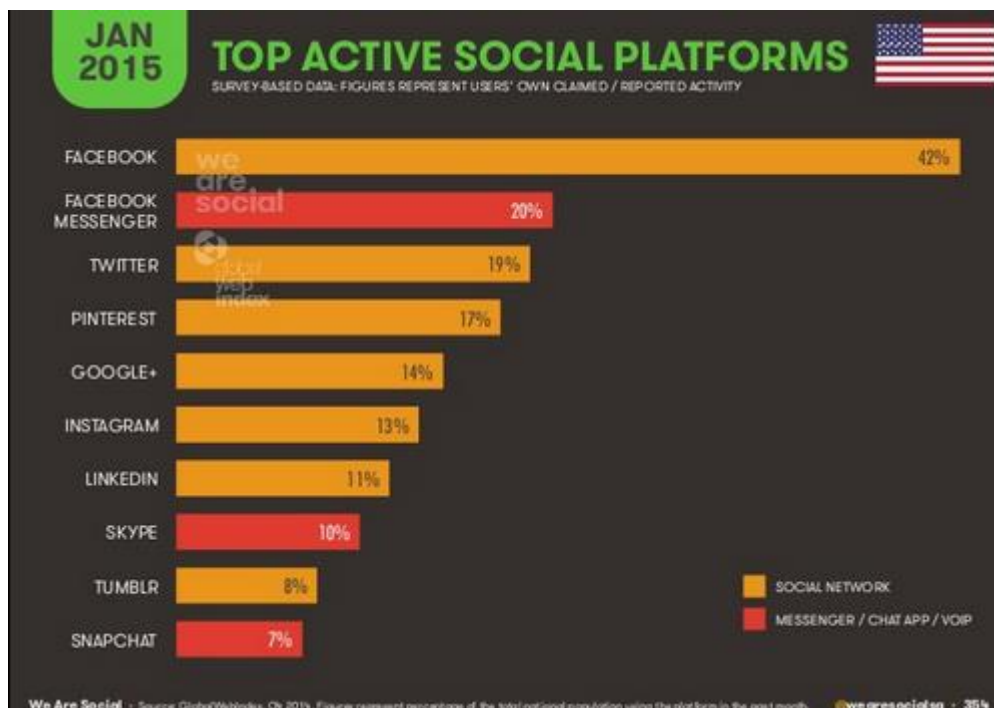


Figure 30. Top active social platforms: United States (Kemp 2015)

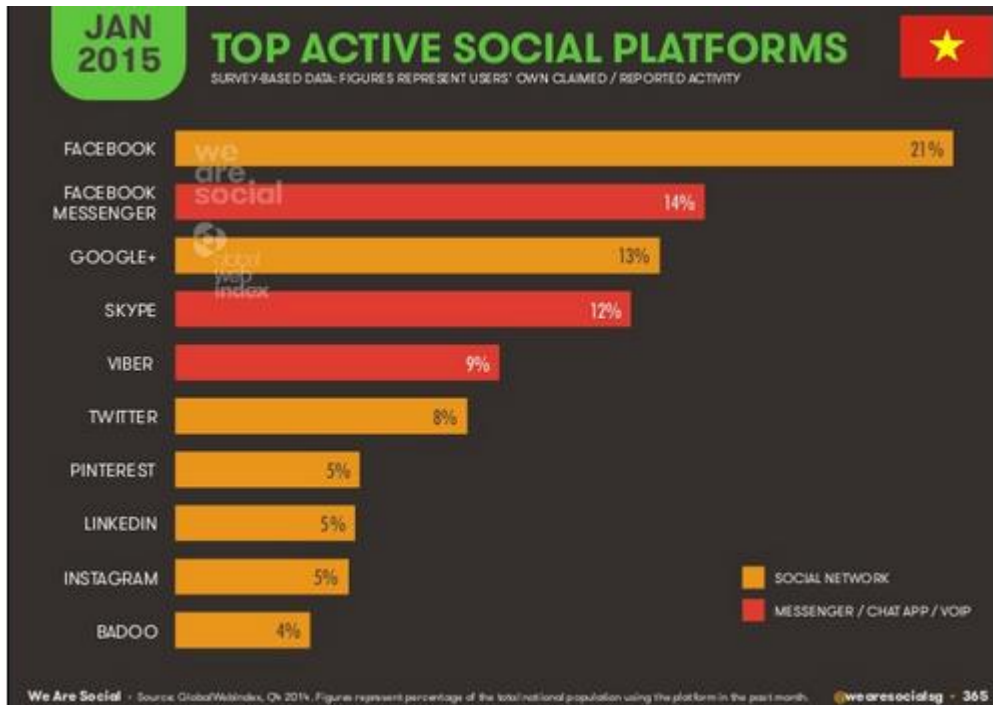


Figure 31. Top active social platforms: Vietnam (Kemp 2015)

## **Appendix 3. Survey forewords and questions**

### **Forewords**

Dear Alumna / Alumnus / Student,

Your input as a current or potential future member of Haaga-Helia Alumni network is extremely valuable in this process and therefore I would appreciate if you could take a short survey, which takes only 5-10 minutes to answer. The link to the survey is at the bottom of this message.

I am a student of the International Business Management degree program and currently doing my thesis in co-operation with the Haaga-Helia Alumni network.

The objective of my study is to

- Clarify the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network
- Improve the ways to stay connected with the alumni (globally)
- Increase the active involvement within the network (globally)

The outcome of the study will be a respective strategy implementation plan for the Haaga-Helia Alumni network.

Survey is anonymous and the results will be handled with utmost confidentiality. After the survey has been closed, 10 winners will be drawn among the respondents (email addresses will be collected independently from the survey), who will each receive an item from the Haaga-Helia webshop.

I am happy to answer any questions regarding this survey.

Thank you for the co-operation.

Survey is open until 18.12.2015.

Link: <https://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/A7804149EDAF7C5E.par>

Best regards

Johanna Tervalo

johanna.tervalo@myy.haaga-helia.fi

### **Questions**

#### **Background information**

1. Are you a Haaga-Helia
  - o Alumna / alumnus

- Student of a degree program (consider the following alumni questions from your future's perspective)
- Exchange student (consider the following alumni questions from your future's perspective)
- Other, what? \_\_\_\_\_

2. When have you graduated?

- Not yet graduated from Haaga-Helia
- 2015
- ... (***all years between these two given in a drop down selection menu***)
- 1960

3. What is the field of your studies?

- Aviation Business
- Business Information Technology
- Communication Management
- Hospitality, Tourism and Experience management
- Information Systems Management
- International Business Management
- International Sales and Marketing
- Multilingual Management Assistants
- Sport Development and Management
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Tourism
- Other, what? \_\_\_\_\_

***(The following options were added after the survey had been opened.)***

- Business administration / business management
- Experience and Wellness Management
- Entrepreneurship and Business Competence
- Finance / accounting
- Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism management
- Journalism
- HRM
- Finance

4. Where are you from?

- Albania
- Australia

- Austria
- Bangladesh
- Belgium
- Brazil
- Cameroon
- Canada
- China
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Egypt
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- Finland
- France
- Gambia
- Germany
- Ghana
- Greece
- Hungary
- India
- Italy
- Kenia
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malaysia
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Norway
- Pakistan
- Philippines
- Poland
- Portugal
- Russia
- Singapore
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Spain



- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Tanzania
- The Netherlands
- Turkey
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Vietnam
- Zambia
- Other, which? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your current country of residence?

- Albania
- Australia
- Austria
- Bangladesh
- Belgium
- Brazil
- Cameroon
- Canada
- China
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Egypt
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- Finland
- France
- Gambia
- Germany
- Ghana
- Greece
- Hungary
- India
- Italy

- Kenia
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malaysia
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Norway
- Pakistan
- Philippines
- Poland
- Portugal
- Russia
- Singapore
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Tanzania
- The Netherlands
- Turkey
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Vietnam
- Zambia
- Other, which? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How did you get the invite to this survey?

- Email
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Face-to-face contact

**Haaga-Helia alumni network in general**

7. What do you see as the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network?

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8. What is your primary benefit expectation from the Haaga-Helia Alumni network/community?

- Social functions and events
- Networking and professional benefits
- Learning about career paths and career opportunities
- Scouting for new recruits and thesis writers
- Educational events: participating
- Educational events: organising or lecturing
- Other, what? \_\_\_\_\_

***(The following option was added after the survey had been opened.)***

- I have no benefit expectations

9. What is your current connection to the Haaga-Helia Alumni network?

- Member
- I know it and I am interested
- I know it but I am not interested
- I don't know it but I am interested
- I don't know it and I am not interested

10. How much do local events (organised by Haaga-Helia Alumni) motivate you to get involved in alumni activities?

- Extremely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

11. As an alumna/alumnus, would you in future consider financial donations (personally or through your company) towards any of the following goals? (select all that apply)

- Scholarship fund or program
- Specific educational program
- General donation towards Haaga-Helia
- Social functions for Haaga-Helia Alumni network
- Other, what? \_\_\_\_\_

- I would not donate any money

12. What would be your preferred method of exchanging information with the Haaga-Helia Alumni network?

- Email
- Haaga-Helia Alumni internet pages
- A social media platform
- Traditional mail

13. Haaga-Helia Alumni network is about to send you an invite to an interesting local event. Please select the the [sic] communication channel that would most likely guarantee your attendance.

- Traditional mail
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Haaga-Helia Alumni internet pages
- Other, which? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you have an account on any social media platform?

- Yes
- No

***(Option 'No' directs the survey next to the last question as the following questions in between concern social media.)***

### **Social media behaviour**

15. Which is your preferred social media platform for professional purposes (education, work)?

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- VKontakt
- Одноклассники
- Xing
- Other, which? \_\_\_\_\_

16. How often do you check your account or feed on this preferred platform?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- A few times a year
- Practically never

17. Would you be willing to start using another social media platform if there were no Haaga-Helia Alumni group in your preferred one?

- Yes, I am open to use any other platform as well
- Yes, but only if I am already using this other one as well
- No, but I would continue to follow the email newsletters
- No, I would not be interested unless they're using my preferred social media platform

18. English might need to be used as the main language on the Haaga-Helia Alumni network's social media platform. What do you think of this?

- Strongly agree, I would accept and prefer using English
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree, I would expect only local language to be used

19. What do you think about getting information about local events in other countries in your feed?

- I would be interested to know what happens in other places
- It would be fine, but I would not read it
- It would decrease the motivation to access the Haaga-Helia Alumni information
- I would not approve / I would cancel my subscription or membership

20. How would you be willing to contribute to the content creation of the social media platform aimed for members of Haaga-Helia Alumni network?

- **Actively:** discuss, share professional info and personal experiences, active building of relationships/connections, contacting and interacting before and after local alumni events
- **Moderately:** read, sometimes discuss, share professional info, accept and propose connections

- **Passively:** read, receive info, accept connections, occasionally initiate activities
- **Not at all:** not interested in networking with other Haaga-Helia alumni
- **Not at all:** not interested in social media or hardly using social media

21. What is the privacy level of your online identity in general?

- Fully open: share openly professional and personal information, interests and opinions
- Restricted: share publicly only carefully considered information, interests and opinions; share personal information within closed groups
- Professional: share only professional information, interests and opinions
- Private: share only extremely restricted information or no information at all

22. How important to you is the real-time availability and interaction with other members of the virtual community?

- Very important
- Important
- Reasonably important
- Slightly important
- Not important

23. How important is the reputation (the number of members, likes etc.) of a virtual community you are considering to join?

- Very important
- Important
- Reasonably important
- Slightly important
- Not important

24. How many connections do you have in your favourite social media platform?

- 0-50
- 50-100
- 100-250
- 250-500
- More than 500

25. Would you be available for interview for a deeper analysis?

*A separate contact information form for the raffle will automatically open after this survey has been submitted.*

- Yes (please leave your email address here for an interview)

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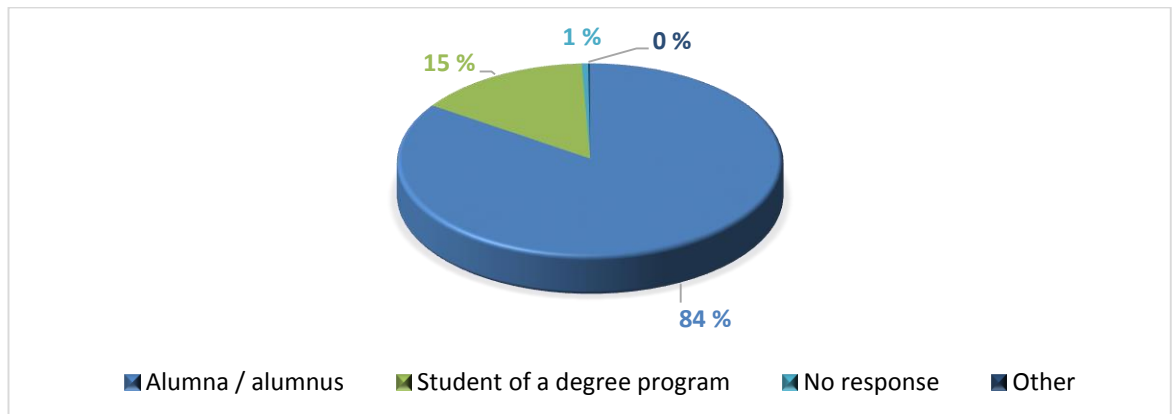
- No

## Appendix 4. Survey results

This appendix contains detailed survey results that were considered in the survey analysis but were not reported in such a detail in the main text.

### Survey demographics

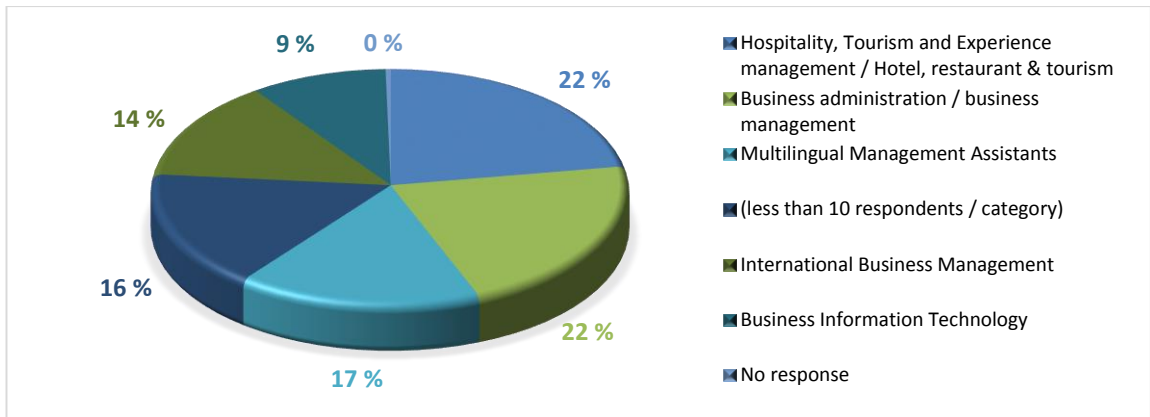
Only one respondent categorised themselves as neither student nor alumna/alumnus, while the remaining respondents were current students of Haaga-Helia (15 %, 83 respondents) or alumni (84 %). A few respondents stated being both a student and an alumna/alumnus under the 'other' option, but in the analysis of the results the first option was considered as their main status. Also some respondents seem to have associated the alumna/alumnus title as referring to the membership of the alumni network, as they had chosen the 'other' option, but specified in the comment having graduated from Haaga-Helia. Three respondents did not reply (1 %).



**Figure 32. The relationship of the respondents to Haaga-Helia (n = 557)**

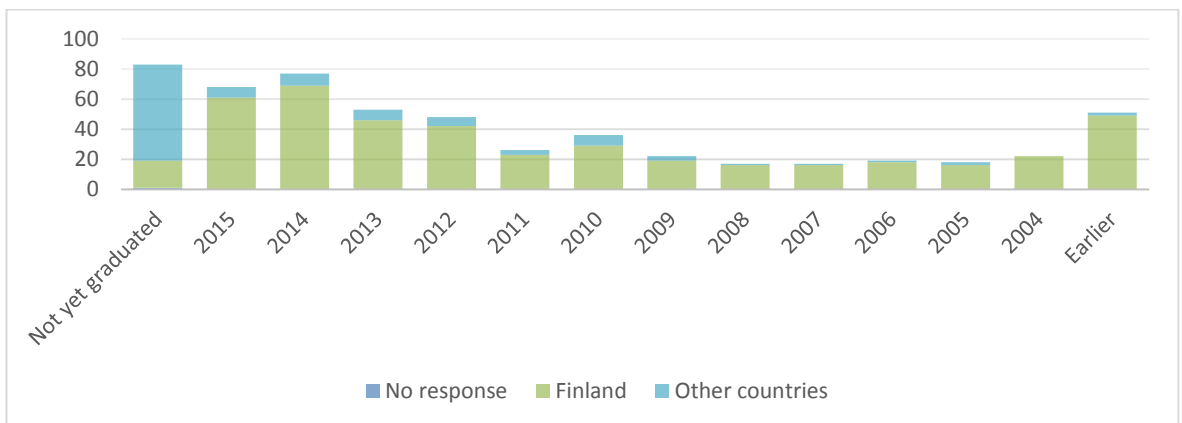
Question number 3 (what is the field of your studies) resulted in 17 categories, of which 8 categories collected more than 10 respondents each (Hospitality, Tourism and Experience management / Hotel, restaurant & tourism; Business administration / business management; Multilingual Management Assistants; International Business Management; Business Information Technology; Finance / accounting; Information Systems Management; Entrepreneurship and Business Competence) and 9 collected less than 10 respondents each (Communication Management; Sports and Leisure Management; International Sales and Marketing; Human Resource Management; Service Management; Journalism; Experience and Wellness Management; Sport Development and Management; Aviation Business). Category 'other' (8 respondents) consisted of fields of study that only one respondent had given or replies that did not specify the field. Figure 33 shows the distribution specifying the proportions of the respondents for the biggest fields of study.



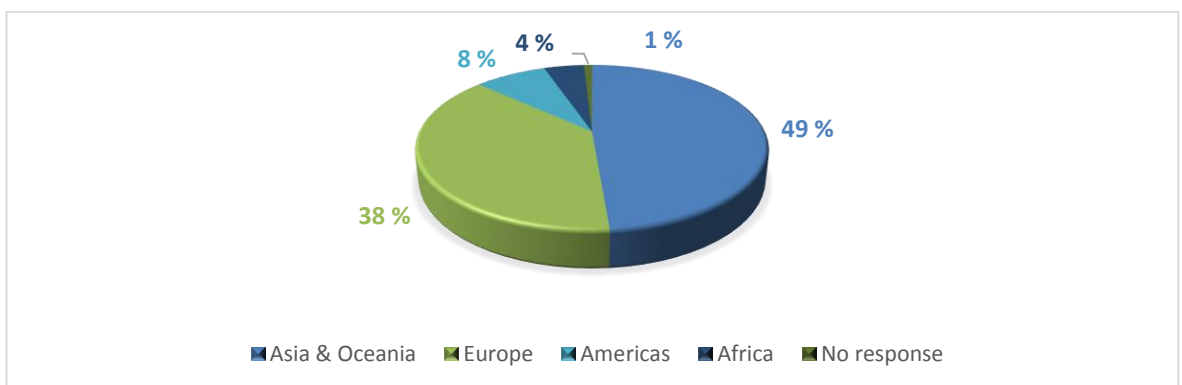


**Figure 33. Distribution of the respondents between the biggest field of study groups (n = 557)**

Based on question 2, students and graduates back in time until year 2004 have been active in taking the survey (506 out of 557; 91 %) (figure 34). For earlier graduates the number of respondents per year drops to under 10 each year. The most senior respondent responded having graduated from Haaga-Helia in 1960, which was also the earliest year available in the drop-down selection box.

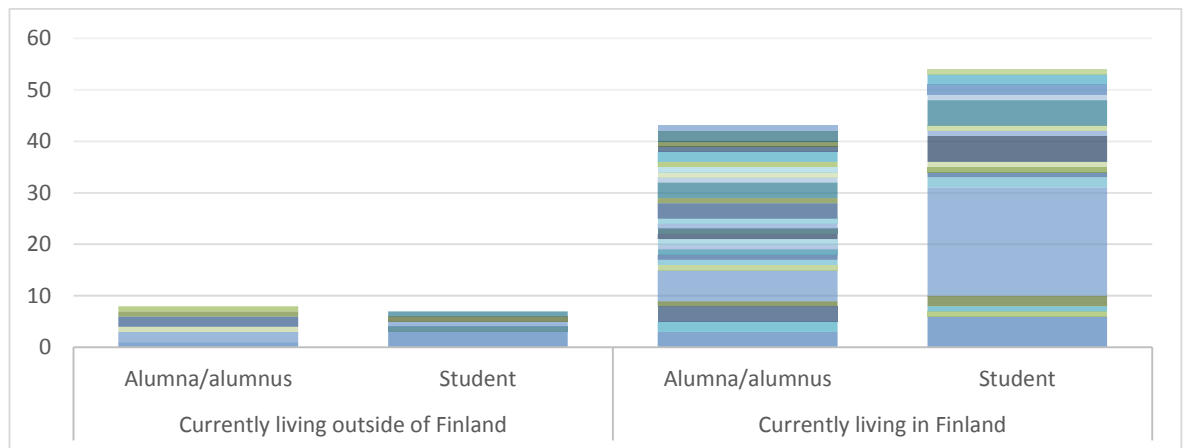


**Figure 34. Graduation year by country of origin (Finland vs. other countries) (n = 557)**

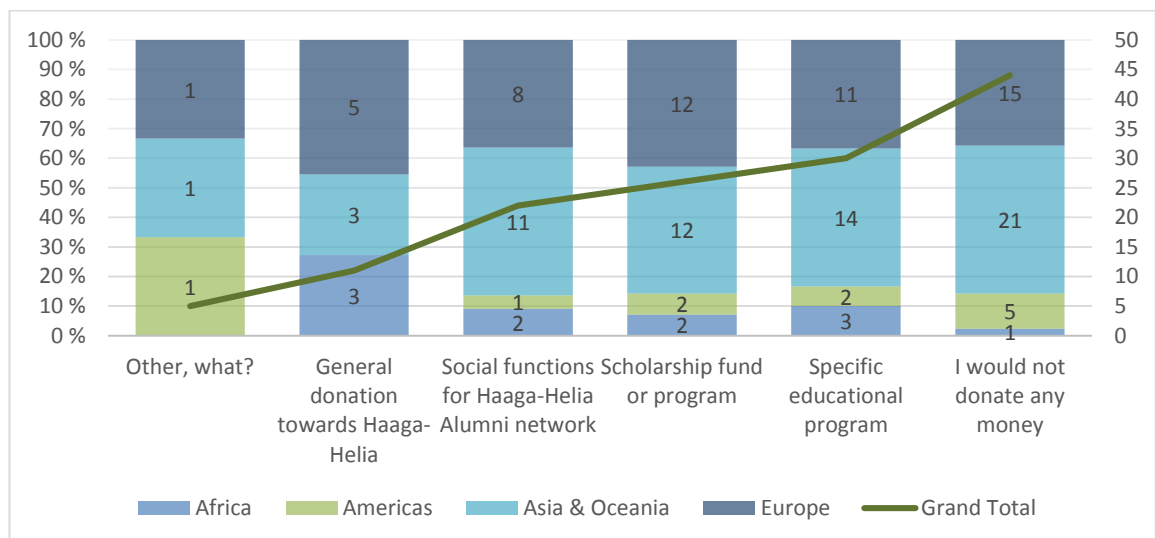


**Figure 35. Distribution of respondents by continent (country of origin) (n = 557)**

The following countries were mentioned as the country of origin: Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Montenegro, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. The following countries were mentioned as the current country of residence: Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Travelling, United Kingdom, United States and Vietnam. This variety of countries (excluding Finland) is illustrated in figure 36, which shows the current country of residence of the respondents. In order to protect the identity of respondents from countries that only were represented by that one respondent, the exact numbers of respondents or the colour codes in figure 36 are not disclosed.



**Figure 36. Current location of the international students and alumni (Finnish students excluded) (see clarification above) (n = 112)**

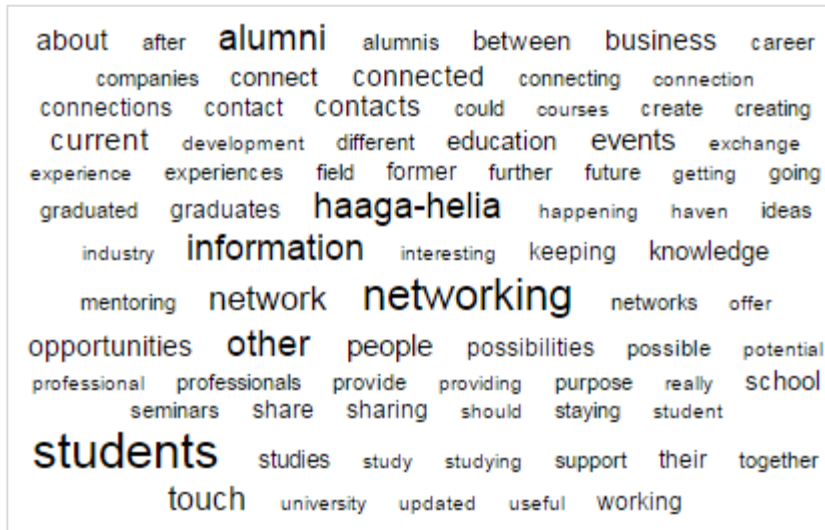


**Figure 37. Willingness to donate to different causes (excluding Finland) (n = 557)**

**Graphs related to question 7 (chapter 5.3.2)**

Question 7 in the alumni survey was

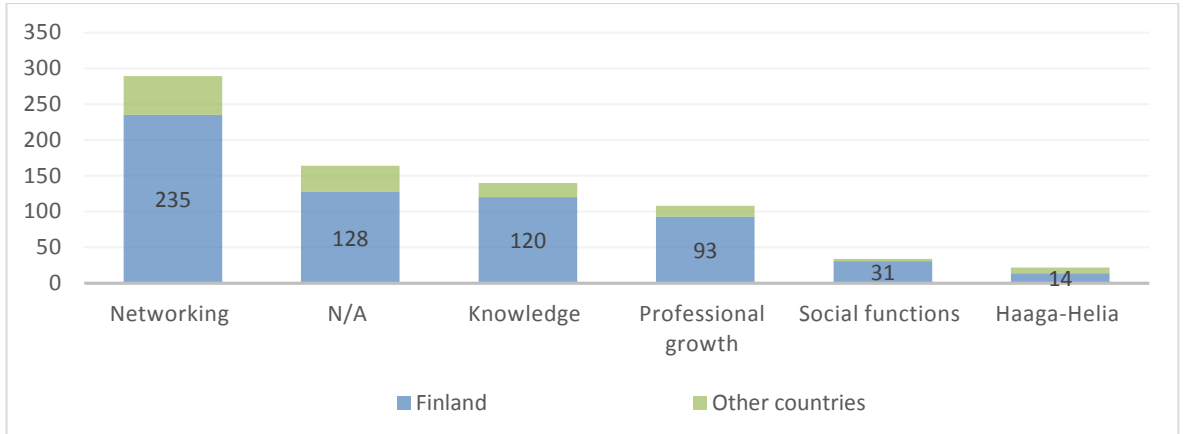
7. What do you see as the purpose of the Haaga-Helia Alumni network?



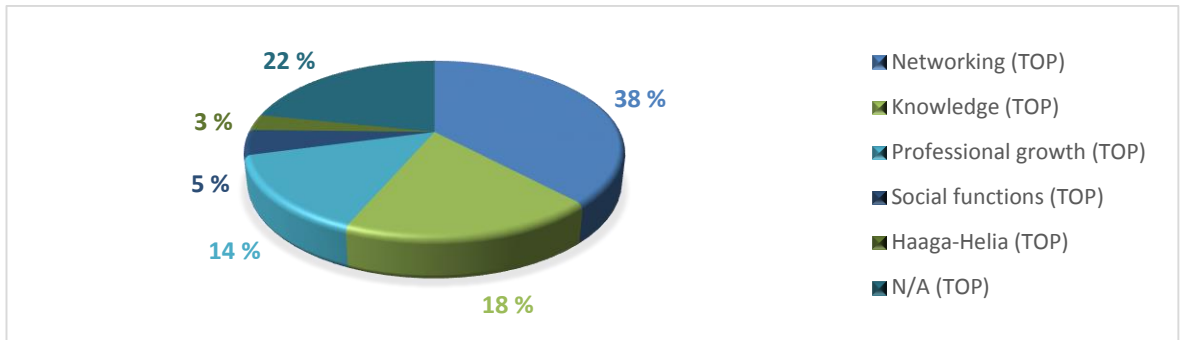
**Figure 38. World cloud of the responses to question 7 (Webropol survey tool)**



**Figure 39. Word map of the words in responses to question 7 (Webropol survey tool)**



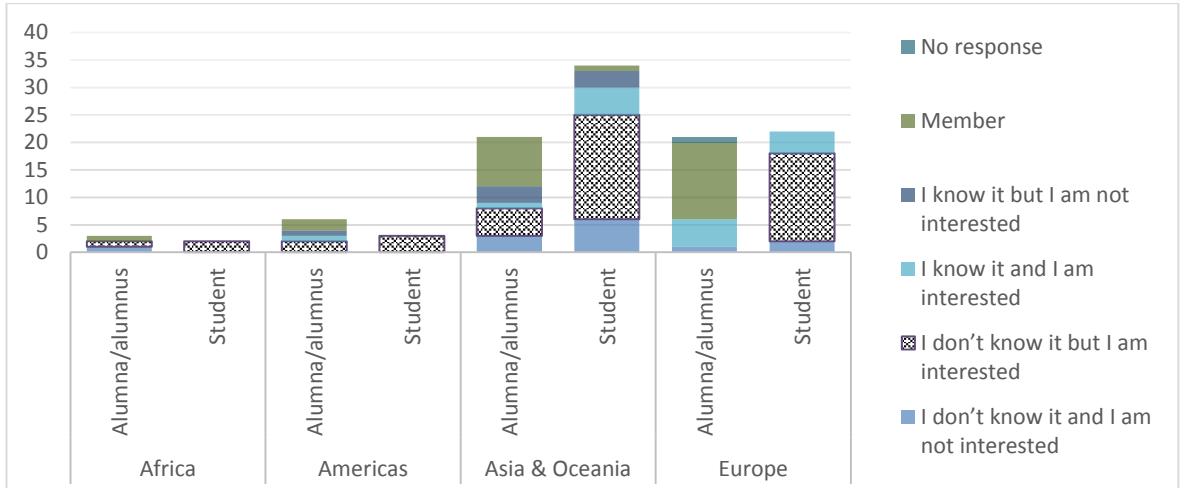
**Figure 40. Top level keywords by frequency from question 7**



**Figure 41. Proportions of the top level concepts in question 7**

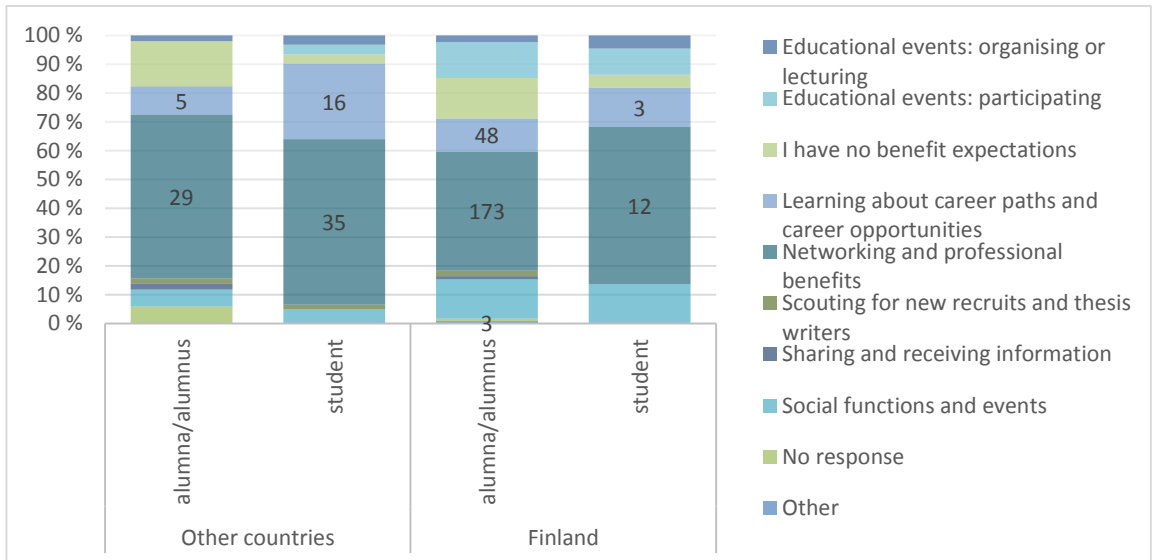
### Haaga-Helia Alumni network related questions

When asked about the connection to the Haaga-Helia Alumni network, 57 % of all respondents answered being a member. 8 % responded that they know what it is but are not interested. A little surprising was that 16 % of the alumni answered being interested but not members (8 % for 'I don't know it but I am interested' and 8 % for 'I know it and I am interested'). However, most of them had received the invitation by email which most likely means that they in fact are members of HHA. This is on one hand a bit concerning as it indicates that even members don't know what HHA is, but on the other hand it provides great opportunities to increase the engagement of these individuals with an internal marketing campaign. Another interesting phenomenon is that many students are actually interested in the alumni network without really knowing what it is. This also offers opportunities for reaching more possible members by increasing the awareness among the students – even if they still would not be eligible for full membership. This is clearly seen in the responses of the international students and alumni (figure 42).

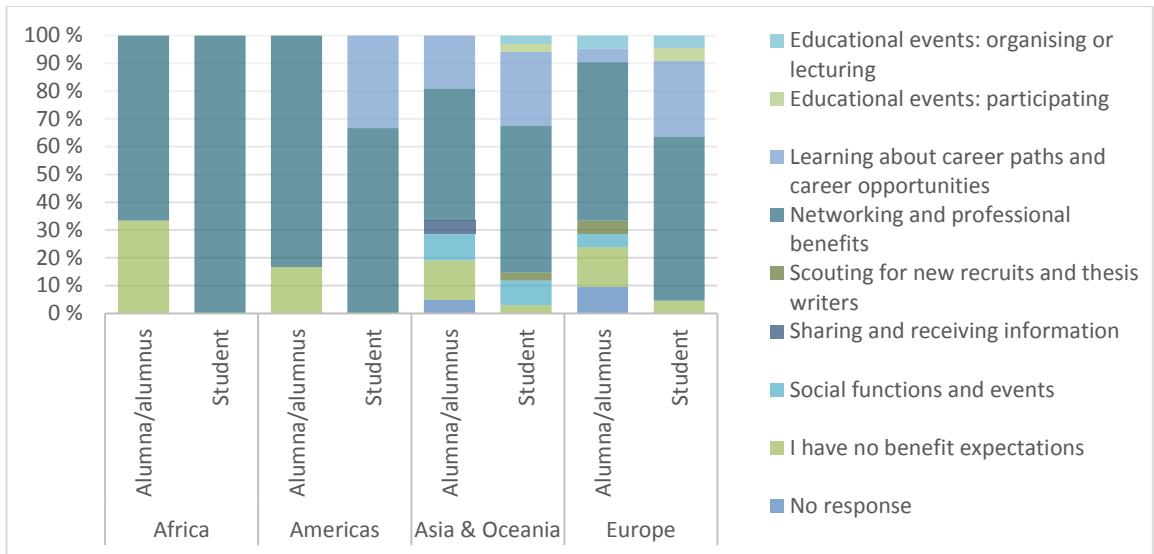


**Figure 42. Connection to HHA for the international alumni and students per continent of origin; Finnish students and alumni excluded (n = 112)**

The respondents were asked about their primary benefit expectation from HHA and according to the results, 'Networking and professional benefits' was the most popular one (45 %; 57 % of students and 43 % of alumni). Figure 43 illustrates the proportion of the different options split into two categories: Finland and other countries.

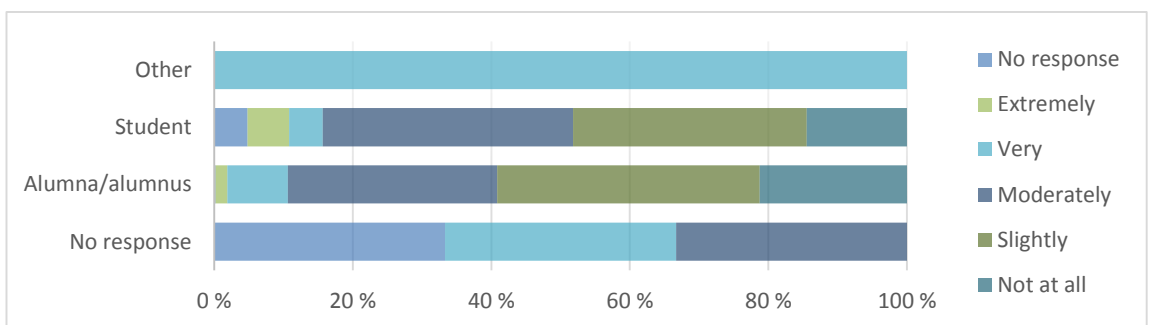


**Figure 43. Distribution of benefit expectation of students and alumni (n = 557)**



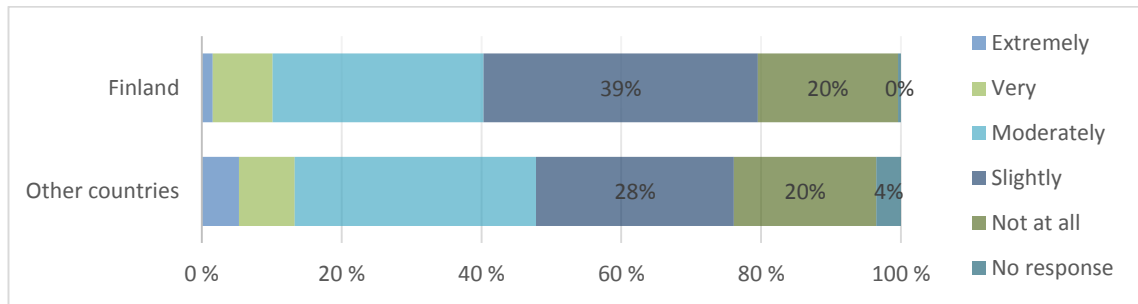
**Figure 44. Distribution of benefit expectations for students and alumni for respondents coming outside of Finland (n = 112)**

One of the questions was designed to find out how local events that are organised by HHA motivate to get involved in the alumni activities. Quite surprisingly neither students nor alumni find these events very interesting with the total of 86 % (82 % alumni, 90 % students) responding ‘not at all’, ‘slightly’ or ‘moderately’ (figure 45).



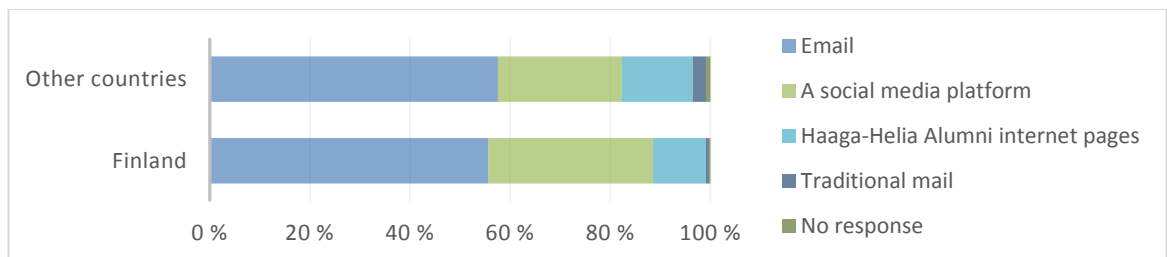
**Figure 45. Motivational impact of local events to get involved in alumni activities (n = 557)**

The same phenomenon can be seen with the international students – only with a tiny shift from slight motivation to moderate motivation (figure 46). The fact that most of the foreign students continue to reside in Finland after their studies (figure 36) might explain why there are no big differences between these two groups of people. However, it also might indicate that the local events in other countries as well that have appeared in the discussions might not help to increase the engagement within the alumni network. On the other hand, it is interesting from the networking perspective, since often the main goal with any physical event is the networking within the attendees. Perhaps this goal has not been reached in the past events or perhaps the modern networking is actually happening in some other context than in face-to-face meetings.



**Figure 46. Motivational impact of local events to get involved in alumni activities; Students and alumni from Finland vs. from other countries (n = 557)**

Regarding communication channels; even though the email is not being read by the majority of alumni according to the email sending system (see chapter 5.1), the respondents consider it to be the most preferred communication channel (figure 47).

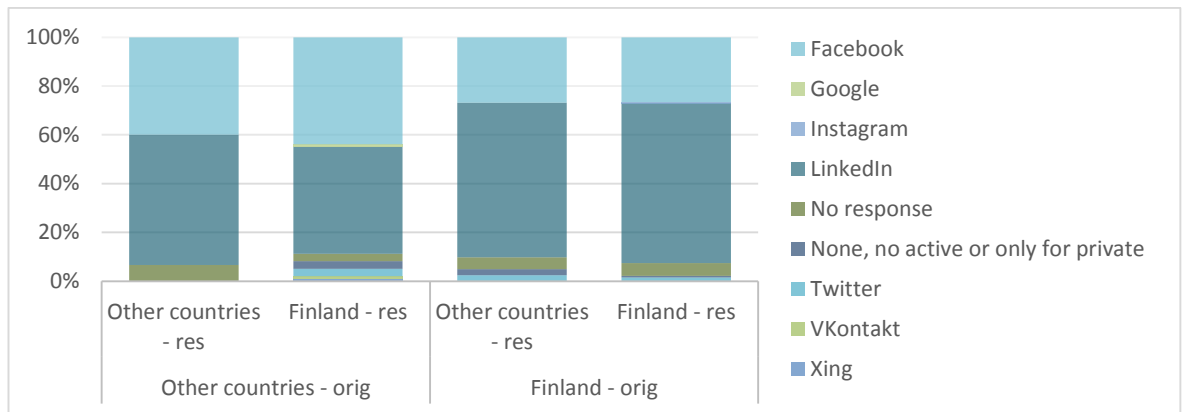


**Figure 47. Preferred communication channel for international and Finnish students (n = 557)**

### General social media behaviour

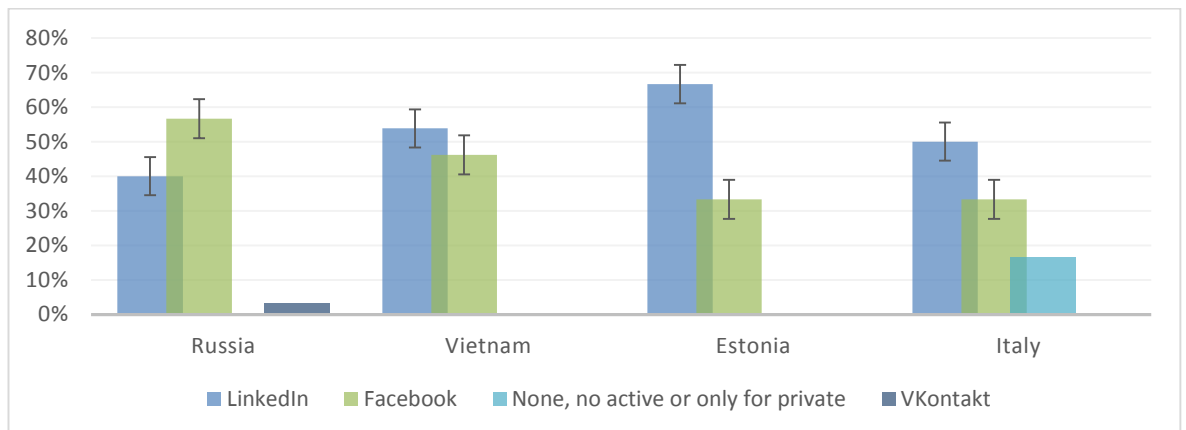
The first question concerned the preferred social media platform for professional purposes. While some responded not having any as they consider social media to be purely recreational media, majority of the respondents selected either Facebook or LinkedIn. One of the main drivers to initiate this study was the task to find out whether there are some differences in the use of communication channels, presumably mainly in social media, but based on the survey results it does not seem that there are major differences (figure 48). Most of the alumni and students coming originally from other countries, who currently reside in Finland (44 %) and outside of Finland (53 %) preferred LinkedIn in the same way as the alumni and students coming from Finland, who currently reside in Finland (66 %) and outside of Finland (63 %). The second most popular social media platform for professional purposes is Facebook, which too has collected rather sizeable popularity (44 % / 40 % / 27 %, respectively). Contrary to the results of a search in Xing.com (see chapter 3.4.4), number of Xing.com users among the respondents was very small (only 1).

Even though on the first glance it would seem that there is significant difference, a correlation analysis (see 5.3.5) conducted between the results for Finnish and international (from both perspectives, country of origin and current country of residence) suggest that the groups have answered similarly, which would indicate that there is no significant difference between the behaviour of these groups.



**Figure 48. Social media platforms among Finnish and international students by country of origin and current residence (n = 557)**

As described above, the distribution of international respondents was very wide, which is why only respondents from a few countries could be considered separately. However, there respondents these respondents also reported both Facebook and LinkedIn as their preferred social media platform for professional purposes (figure 49).

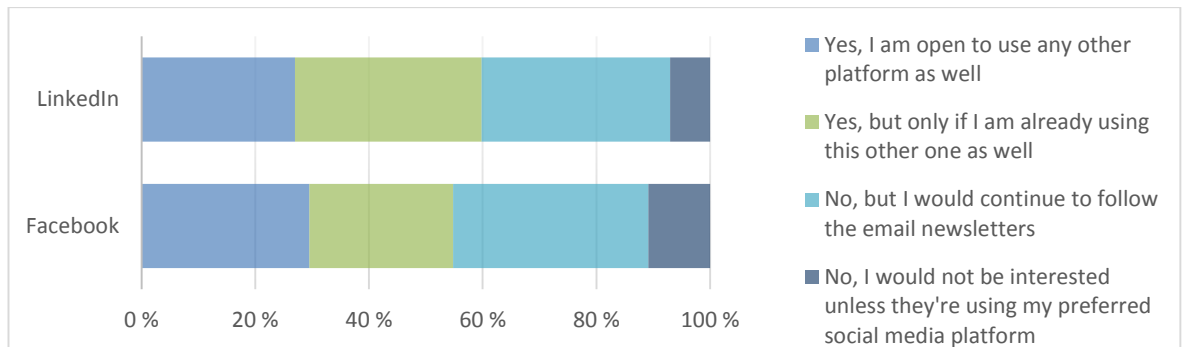


**Figure 49. Social media platforms among the biggest country-specific groups (n = 58)**

If there was no site on the preferred social media platform for professional purposes, roughly a quarter of both LinkedIn and Facebook users would be willing to start using even a completely new platform (figure 50). However, quite a larger proportion of both Facebook and LinkedIn users would be either willing to consider the other platform (if they were already using it) or continue to rely on the newsletter as a source of information. On-

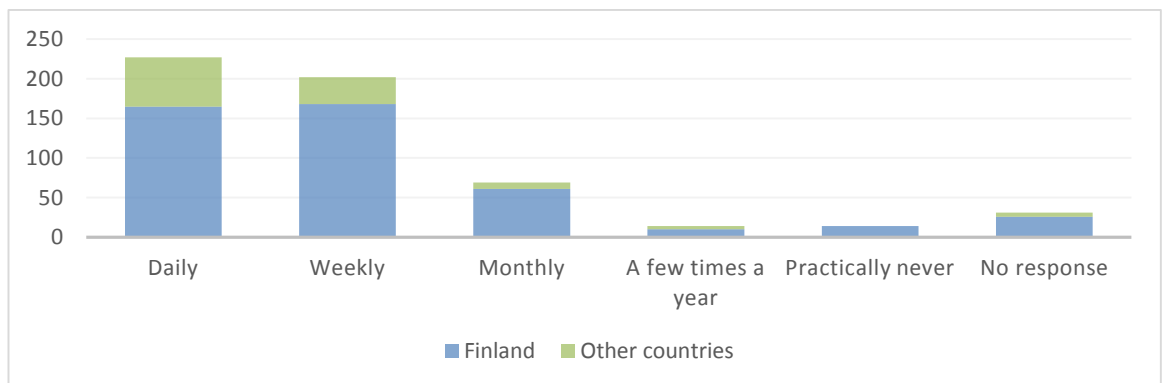


ly 10 % of Facebook users and 7 % of LinkedIn users state that they would only be interested in the alumni information if it was published in their preferred social media platform.



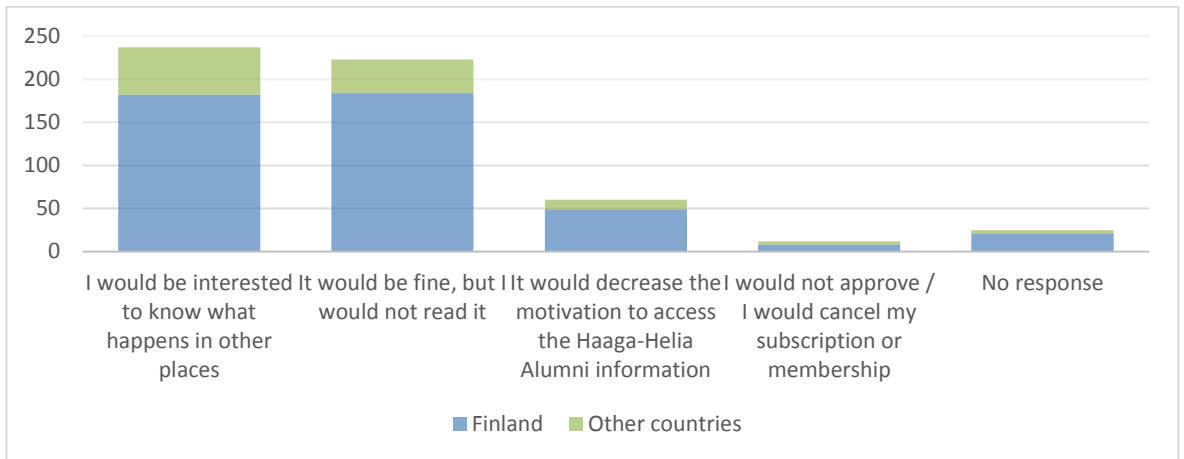
**Figure 50. Willingness to use other social media platforms (LinkedIn and Facebook users) (n = 557)**

77 % of the respondents check their preferred social media site for professional purposes on a daily or weekly basis (figure 51). This means that new content should be provided roughly on a same frequency (ie. at least weekly) in order to keep the source relevant.

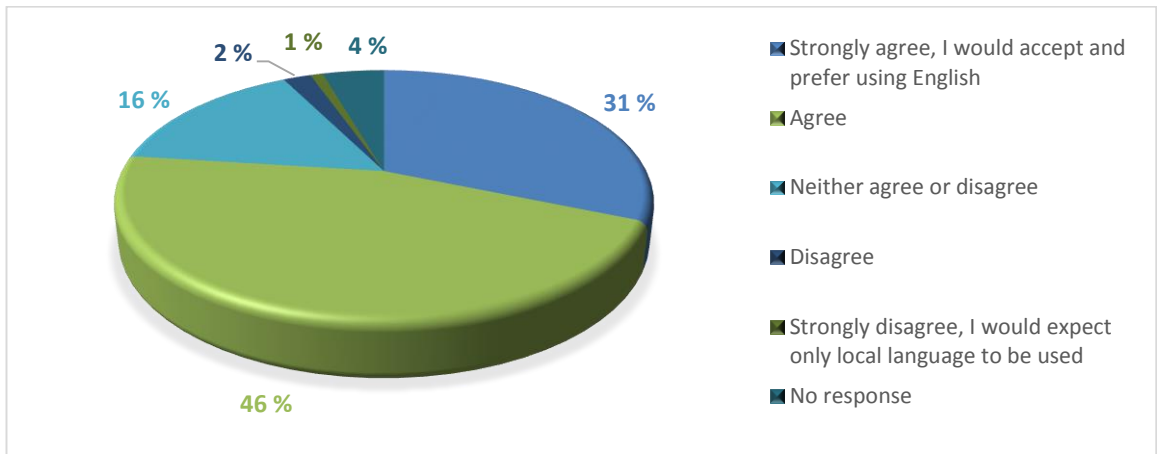


**Figure 51. Checking frequency of the preferred social media platform for professional purposes (n = 557)**

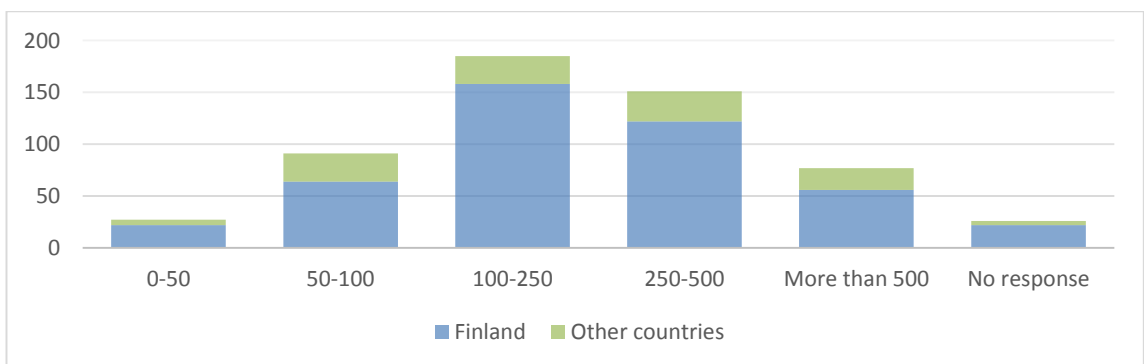
Regarding the international nature of the possible alumni site, the respondents did not consider it problematic to receive information that does not concern them directly, or have all the information in English (figure 52 and figure 53, respectively). The options in question regarding content were formulated in a way that most likely directed the respondents' answers to a more positive direction (*I would be interested to know what happens in other places*). However, this was done knowingly, as the first association with redundant data easily is frustration or negative feelings and so the aim was to make the respondents see this unnecessary (for them) information from the networking and community building perspective.



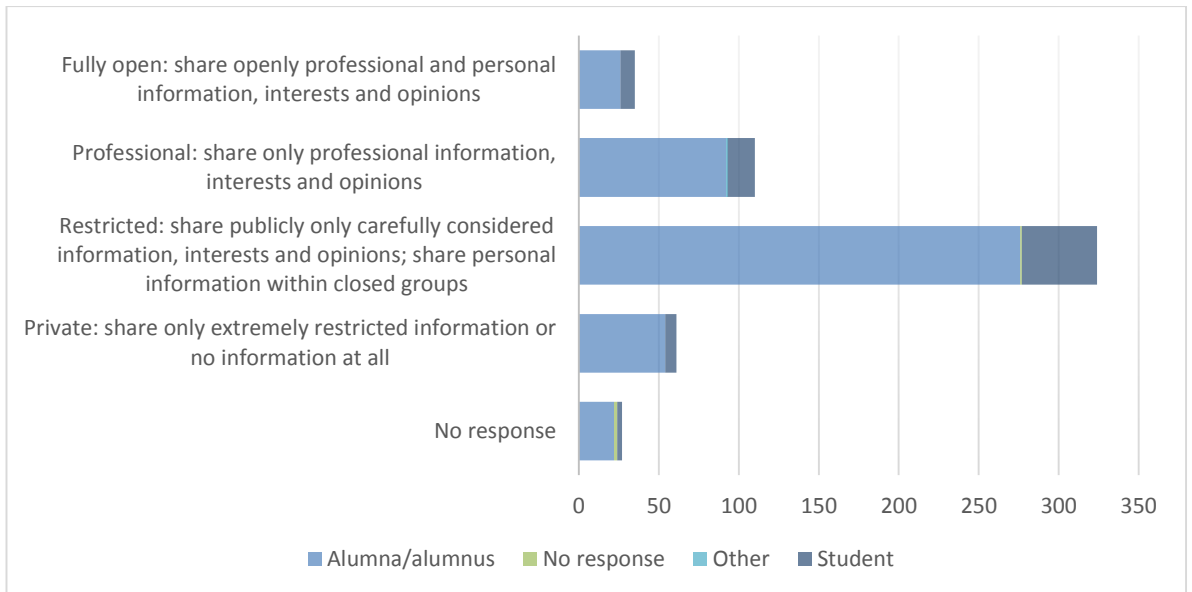
**Figure 52. Attitude towards seeing posts concerning other countries' information in one's feed by country of origin (n = 557)**



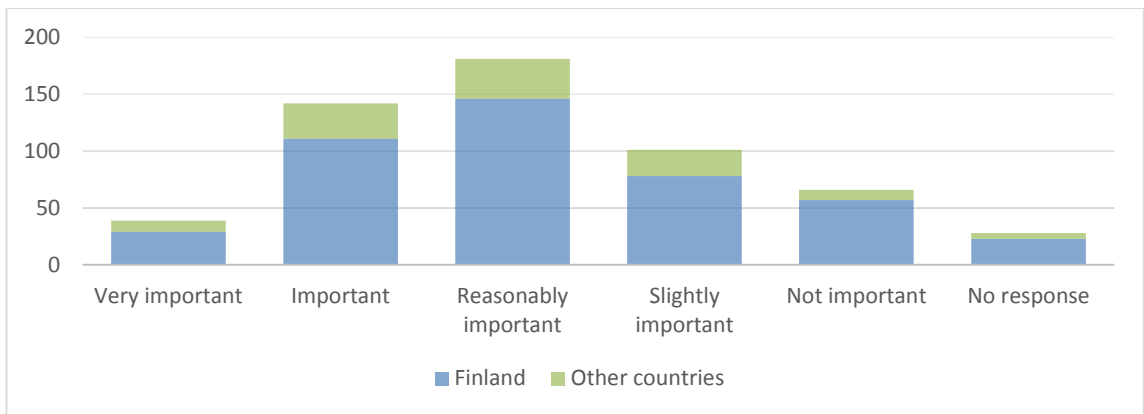
**Figure 53. Willingness to accept English as the language (n = 557)**



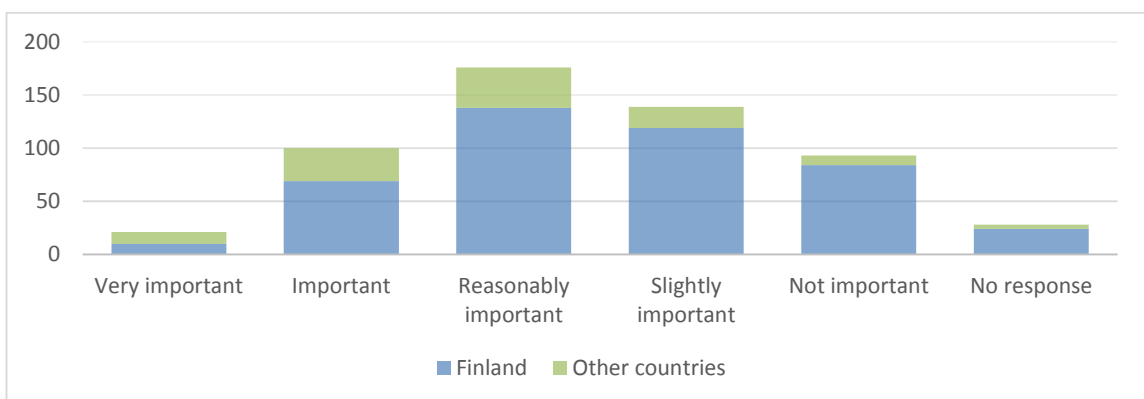
**Figure 54. Number of connections in favourite social media platform by country of origin (n = 557)**



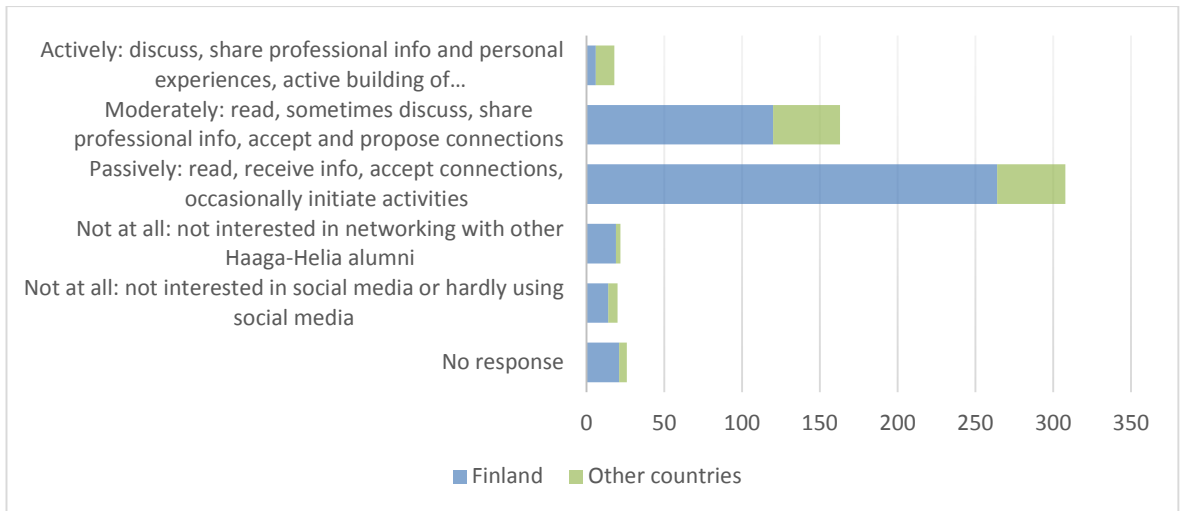
**Figure 55. Online identity by relation to Haaga-Helia (n = 557)**



**Figure 56. Importance of the reputation of the virtual community by country of origin (n = 557)**

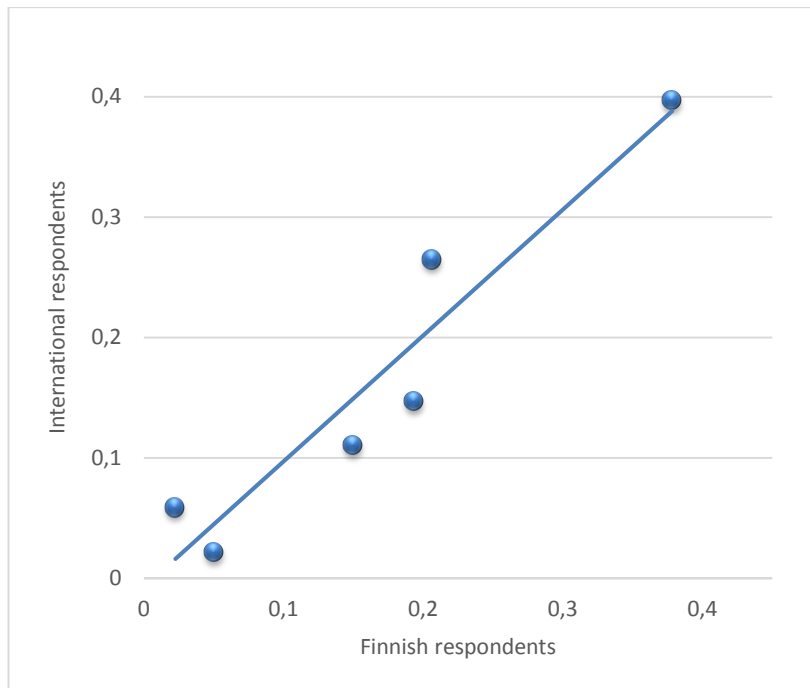


**Figure 57. Real-time availability of other users by country of origin (n = 557)**



**Figure 58. Willingness to create content by country of origin (n = 557)**

## Appendix 5. Pearson analysis - illustrations

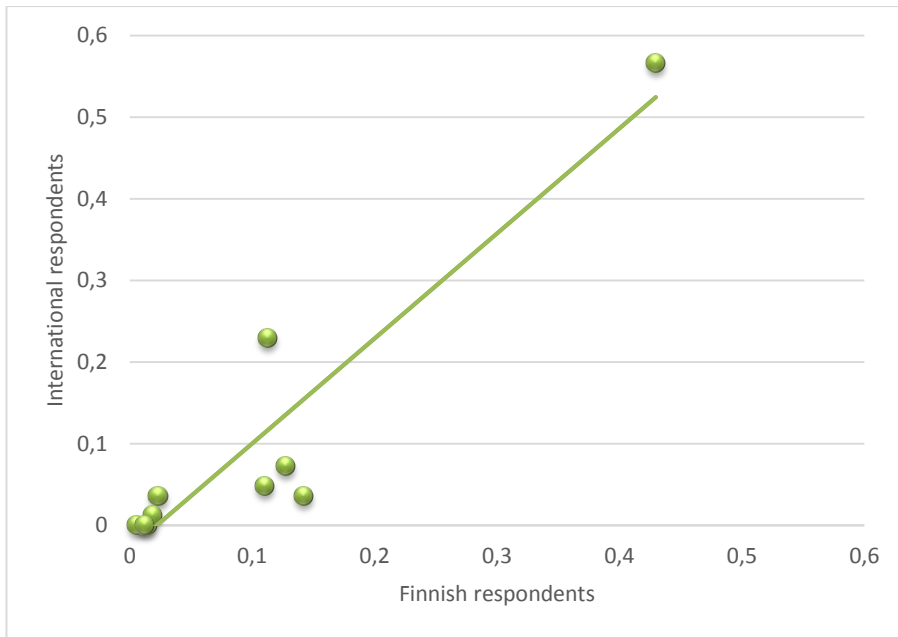


**Figure 59. Dataset points for question 7 with variables Finnish and International respondents (R= 0,951277937)**

		Finnish	International
Finnish	Pearson Correlation	1	,951**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,004
	N	6	6
International	Pearson Correlation	,951**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004	
	N	6	6

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure 60. Pearson correlation between alumni and students for top level categories in question 7 (SPSS)**



**Figure 61. Dataset points for question 7 with variables alumni and student responses (R=0,928831779)**

		Alumni	Students
Alumni	Pearson Correlation	1	,929**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	10	10
Students	Pearson Correlation	,929**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	10	10

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure 62. Pearson correlation between Alumni and students for primary benefit expectation (SPSS)**

**Appendix 6. An example of an event feedback form**

1. Please rate the following items (1 (poor) – 5 (excellent))
  - a. Content of the presentation
  - b. Speaker's presentation skills
  - c. Technical implementation (quality of the live stream, usability...)
  - d. Online discussion during the seminar
  
2. The time of day for the seminar was
  - a. Perfect
  - b. Too early
  - c. Too late
  
3. Would you recommend such a seminar to a friend, colleague or an old classmate?
  
4. We'd appreciate any open feedback. \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7. An example of an implementation project WBS (high level)

